



BUILDING STRONG AND READY FAMILIES



INTERIM REPORT

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Building Strong and Ready Families

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This executive summary provides a summary of the major findings of the program evaluation of the Building Strong and Ready Families (BSRF) initiative. BSRF is an initiative that more incorporates the principles of Army Well-Being into the local setting. The study report, Building Strong and Ready Families, provides the requisite detail on study findings and implications. The evaluation of BSRF centers on the following key elements:

- Program Design and Readiness Implications
- Couple Functioning Perspective
- Army Life Perspective
- Program Satisfaction
- BSRF Program Provider Perspective
- Obstacles to Effective BSRF Program Implementation
- Implications for The Army

This interim report finds that BSRF training improves couple functioning, improves couple communication about Army life, and generates a high degree of satisfaction with the training on the part of couples and providers. Specific obstacles associated with implementing BSRF, affecting couples and providers, can be overcome through improved training management and communications. The integrated, preventive based, holistic approach to BSRF, combined with effective implementation at the local level, poses tangible benefits for unit commanders who believe that soldier and family readiness are integral components of unit readiness. This evaluation highlights the complementary nature of BSRF in developing soldier and spouse competence and confidence in their relationship and their role within The Army.

BSRF is designed to be a Unit Readiness Multiplier

FM 7-0 states the following: *“Training for warfighting is our number one priority in peace and in war. Warfighting readiness is derived from tactical and technical competence and confidence. Competence relates to the ability to fight our doctrine through tactical and technical execution. Confidence is the individual and collective belief that we can do all things better than the adversary and the unit possesses the trust and will to accomplish the mission.”*

Unit warfighting readiness, focused on mission preparedness, is positively impacted by healthy command climate and individuals who are confident in the Army’s commitment to their families during periods of deployment enhance mission preparedness. Soldiers who know their families are fully equipped to handle deployments are more mission focused and combat ready. Likewise, Army spouses who are self-reliant and resilient are more capable of handling

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deployments and the subsequent reunions with their soldier sponsors. Strong Army families enable the chain of command to focus more effort on sustaining unit readiness absent the readiness distracters associated with resolving soldier and family problems stemming from personal and family issues. Strong Army families provide the foundation for more effectively developing ready Army families. Without this foundation, family readiness is illusory.



Founded upon the principle that individual and unit training helps to build strong units, BSRF is designed as a commander's training program that is a preventive approach to improving soldier and family readiness, helping participants build a strong family—physically, relationally and spiritually. Designed to enhance readiness and improve the well-being of Army families, BSRF seeks to support and strengthen program participants and their partners through three major program components: Relationship Building; Health Promotion; Spiritual Encouragement, Formation, and Support. A fourth component that has been an option is Army Family Team Building.

While the Army has developed and deployed numerous programs to treat and respond to family and couple issues, the strengths in the underlying design of BSRF lie in a focus on *prevention* rather than reactive, crisis management. While the unit chaplain is the implementing agent for this training, a key tenet of BSRF is the unit commander's *ownership* of the program. This is "operationalized" through command incentives and reduction of barriers for participants, such as time off from duty to participate and the awarding of promotion points for completion of "training." BSRF training provides the basis for extending the emphasis of the *Army Core Values* of Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless-service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage into other major aspects of life (marriage, health, and spiritual condition). Finally, BSRF provides an effective platform for early introduction (and referral) of participants to existing helping agencies, increasing their understanding of the role of these agencies and providing the opportunity for improved utilization of the services of these agencies.

BSRF Training Improves Couple Functioning

Couples showed gains on most measures of couple functioning from pre-BSRF to post-BSRF and at the one month follow-up. Of note is the finding that couples who came into BSRF relatively less happy in their relationships than others demonstrated the strongest positive gains following BSRF. The following are key findings within this study:

- Couples reported improvements in their own abilities to stop negative patterns when they arose—a key goal of the relationship building aspects of BSRF.

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- BSRF couples reported reductions in various patterns of negative interaction that are associated with marital distress and divorce.
- BSRF couples reported increases in relationship satisfaction and confidence.
- Based on a composite score of relationship quality (satisfaction, confidence, conflict management, and negative interaction), 67% of participants' scores significantly improved from pre-BSRF to post-BSRF. When assessed out to one month following BSRF, 75% of participants' scores improved from their pre-BSRF levels. (See report and notes for detailed statistical analyses.)

BSRF Training Improves Couples' Ability to Adapt to Army Life

Couples completing BSRF reported gains in three important dimensions related to being an Army couple:

- Feeling like they could handle Army life well
- The ability to talk constructively about Army issues
- Belief that the Army cares for Army families

In addition, other aspects of Army life were evaluated, with the following findings:

- The data provided evidence that Army chaplains play a very important role in showing care and tangible support to Army families.
- No changes in overall Army morale were found in this short-term evaluation.
- No changes in the degree to which problems at home affected performance of Army duties were reported. However, problems and issues at work (Army duties) were reported to be having less negative impact on home life following BSRF.
- While improved retention is a long-term goal of BSRF, this program evaluation covers a short period of time. As a consequence of this period of time, a very modest increase in the likelihood of remaining in the Army was found on one measure, while another measure showed no effect on re-enlistment sentiments.

BSRF Generates High Satisfaction Ratings from Participant Couples

Couples reported very high satisfaction with BSRF. Ninety-four percent (94%) of BSRF participants say that, as a result of taking BSRF, it was “more true” that they would recommend BSRF to a friend.

- Ninety percent (90%) of the participants were either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the relationship building component of BSRF.

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- Seventy-five percent (75%) of the participants were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the overall BSRF program.

BSRF Generates High Satisfaction Ratings from Providers

Providers believe that BSRF positively impacts couples in their attitudes and beliefs about the Army, but believe that the strongest impacts are on couple functioning.

- Eighty-Six (86%) of providers believe that BSRF enhances the morale of participants.
- Providers believe that their own superiors are very supportive of BSRF. However, they see other commanders as being considerably less supportive of BSRF.
- Seventy-six percent (76%) of providers strongly believe that BSRF should be continued.
- Chaplains, in particular, believe that the experience of BSRF enhances their own training for fulfilling their mission in the Army.

BSRF Implementation Requires Overcoming Participant and Provider Obstacles

Successful implementation of BSRF requires overcoming a number of obstacles that were identified in this study. These obstacles impact the participant and provider alike.

- Both couples and providers report that the need to secure child-care presents a strong obstacle to couples participating in BSRF.
- Many couples said that not knowing about BSRF until close to the starting point made it harder to participate. Providers echoed this concern, though did not rate it as highly.
- Providers reported that deployments significantly interfered with their ability to get couples to BSRF.
- Forty-one percent (41%) of providers but only 10% of couples that participated in BSRF listed a lack of command support as making couple attendance difficult. Inherent within this finding is the obvious corollary that those listing command support as an issue nonetheless received sufficient command support to participate, vice those who did not participate at all in BSRF.
- Providers listed “accessing funds” as their own greatest hurdle to conducting BSRF.

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- In addition to other points made above, providers also frequently mentioned the difficulty of clearing enough time in their own routines to conduct BSRF.

BSRF has Strategic Implications for Improving Well-Being within the Army

BSRF is a strategic initiative that incorporates the holistic principles of Army Well-Being, as demonstrated through the integration of previously successful marriage enrichment, health education, and spiritual development programs into the local military family setting in order to strengthen Army couples in ways that improve family readiness and support the Army's warfighting readiness mission. BSRF fully complements other strategic initiatives, such as Spouse Orientation and Leader Development (SOLD), and existing programs such as Army Family Team Building (AFTB), and can provide impetus for various other institutions to make greater attempts to help couples build strong and healthy marriages and families. Initiatives such as BSRF must remain focused on demonstrating a positive impact on unit readiness, and must integrate seamlessly into the unit training environment. A powerful element of BSRF is the fact that it is not designed to be a center based, installation support program, but it is, instead unit focused and adaptable to active and reserve component units equally. Providers and couples believe that something very worthwhile is taking place with BSRF; this is validated by the findings of this interim report - increased competence and confidence of soldiers and spouses in their marital relationship. These perceptions, combined with the findings in this report, argue for the continuance of BSRF, its refinement, and further research into the ways in which this program can impact Army couples, Army retention, and Army readiness.

- The evidence in this report indicates that BSRF can positively impact Army couples in various ways. Further research that employs random assignment, longer follow-up assessments, and access to “hard” Army data on such outcomes as re-enlistment, readiness, domestic violence incidents, and divorce or early return of dependents would provide additional evidence as to the impact of a horizontally and vertically aligned approach.
- Support among commanders for BSRF would likely benefit from stronger, Army-wide promotion of such services, as well as command support from the highest levels. BSRF must be integrated into the normal training management cycle to be most effective; this requires commanders to address this aspect of readiness training within the commander's vision. If the phrase “we train soldiers and grow leaders” is a truism, commanders must see this as part of growing leaders – both soldiers and spouses. Most important, commanders must be able to see the tangible benefit of BSRF in reducing family-related soldier training and readiness distractions.
- Providers strongly believe in the value to Army couples of having a night away from children and responsibilities. The specific value of such “over-nights” for Army couples should be closely considered, as policy makers consider how best to implement BSRF.

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- BSRF may be particularly suited for assisting first term couples in making the transition into the Army culture. With a very high percentage of BSRF participant couples falling into the first term category in this program evaluation, this may be evident in three ways:
 - With a high percentage of first term soldiers dropping out of the Army (30%), gains in couple functioning and perceptions that "the Army cares for them" may increase the percentage of married soldiers who complete their first enlistment.
 - Critical to any transition is the need to develop a support system, especially for geographically mobile Army families. Over the 3-4 weeks framing the BSRF sessions, couples develop relationships with key helping agents such as chaplains, community health nurses, and, most importantly, peers. This reduces isolation, especially for spouses, and provides the means for Soldiers and spouses to connect to the Army. This also provides a network of support and a sense of community among participants, which fosters self-reliance. This becomes a readiness multiplier, in that soldiers who are more confident of the Army's commitment to families and their spouses' ability to operate effectively during periods of deployment will remain more mission focused.
 - Because of the holistic nature of BSRF, first term couples can be introduced to a wide variety of well-being related programs that they otherwise might not learn about. This includes elements of Army Family Team Building, which provides information on Army programs, as well as numerous training venues for soldiers and spouses.

II. OVERVIEW OF BSRF AND THIS EVALUATION

Background Information on the Program

The Changing Army Dynamic

Joint Vision 2020 addresses the growing need for the military to recruit and retain high quality volunteers for America's future defense needs. As the Army has evolved from a conscript force of mostly single male soldiers to a volunteer force including many married soldiers of both sexes, the need to address the implications of the family attachments of soldiers have become more acute. This means that the well-being of Army families has become an increasingly important principle in the Army's effort to attract and keep the best soldiers it can muster.



Following the Vietnam War, leadership in the Army Chaplaincy recognized that Chaplains would play an increasingly important role in supporting and improving the quality of life for Army families. As a result, training in family life ministry has grown steadily within the Chaplaincy. While family life chaplains have been given training in various tools for accomplishing this mission, there has been a lack of a systematically developed, refined, and applied model for addressing the needs of Army marriages on an Army-wide basis. As with the plethora of "quality of life" programs and initiatives, addressing the needs of Army marriages has been largely reactive and remained within numerous functional entities, reducing the effectiveness of the various individual efforts. The evolution of individual programs have met needs as issues have arisen, but a holistic, full spectrum approach to Army marriages has not been deployed.



The Case for Building Strong and Ready Families

As the Army dynamic has changed, societal dynamics have also changed. As the Army demographic continues to change toward a force of married soldiers (60%), Army marriages are subject to the same strains and challenges that face contemporary American society. According to the 1992 U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, couples who are marrying for the first time face roughly a 40-50% chance of divorce. Additionally, a great deal of research indicates that mismanaged conflict predicts both marital distress and negative effects for children, and also that conflicts at home lead to decreased work productivity. Marital distress and family conflict impact unit readiness, reducing the affected soldier's effectiveness, and consequently, distracting unit leaders from training and readiness activities to address soldier performance issues. A basic tenet of Army Well-Being centers on the principle that soldiers who know their families are fully equipped to handle deployments are more mission focused and combat ready. Army deployments, in the face of the global war on terrorism and the pre-9/11 mission load, continue to increase in frequency and duration. Soldiers with unresolved



marital conflicts become less effective in the theater of operations, while their families become a drain on austere rear detachment operations and family support agencies. The prevalence of advanced communications (internet, e-mail, telephony) can further impact on this effectiveness at the soldier and unit level as well, creating further distractions and issues. These unresolved conflicts can result in negative, even disastrous, reunions when soldiers return from the theater of operations.

Against this operational backdrop, the Building Strong and Ready Families (BSRF) program is designed to enhance readiness and improve the well-being of soldiers and Army families, with the goal of strengthening the soldier and his or her family in major aspects of life. The innovative design seeks to support and strengthen active duty participants and their partners through three major program components:

- Relationship Building
- Health Promotion
- Spiritual Encouragement, Formation, and Support

The BSRF model was developed in the U.S. Army at the unit level in 1999, specifically by the unit ministry team at the 25th Infantry Division (Light) Artillery at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii, led by a Brigade Commander (Colonel Jose Reojas) and his Brigade Chaplain (Chaplain Jonathan McGraw). The chief aim of BSRF was conceptualized in its development in this way:

“BSRF is a commander’s training program that is a chaplain-led preventive approach to family readiness, helping participants build a strong family—physically, relationally and spiritually.” (*From initial briefing to Chief of Chaplains, May 2000*)

The strengths in the underlying design of BSRF lie in the following elements:

- A focus on *prevention* rather than reactive, crisis management.
- Unit commander’s *ownership* of the program.
- A basis of extending the emphasis of the *Army Core Values* of Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless-service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage into other major aspects of life (marriage, health, and spiritual condition).
- *Comprehensive goals* aimed at improving both the readiness of active duty personnel to accomplish the Army mission and the well-being of Army families.
- Innovative incentives and reduction of barriers for participants, such as time off from duty to participate and the awarding of promotion points for completion of “training.”
- An effective platform for early introduction (and referral) of participants to existing helping agencies.

- BSRF utilizes an evidenced-based curriculum including PREP, with over twenty years of research and program development in couple relationships and communication and the application of the transtheoretical model as the guiding conceptual framework for the health promotion intervention (Prochaska, J. O., & Velicer, W. F. (1997). The transtheoretical model of health behavior change. American Journal of Health Promotion, 12(1), 38-48.)

The Building Strong and Ready Families (BSRF) program gives Army Chaplains a means to more effectively support commanders by providing Army families with a training program that is holistic, built around best practices in several important areas related to well-being, and standardized yet flexible. As such, it has received support from the Chief of Chaplains as a program that is consistent with the overarching goal of increasing the impact of the Chaplaincy on Army culture—in this case, through training and support for Army couples and families.

The health promotion part of the BSRF program provides a platform for community-based screening, education and risk reduction in soldiers and their spouses. The BSRF health promotion goals are:

1. To create an awareness of the impact of current behaviors on soldier couples health and well-being in the future.
2. Early identification of and intervention for health risk behaviors.
3. Acquisition of health promotion skills for soldier couples that support wellness and combat readiness.
4. To accelerate forward movement in stages of readiness to change health risk behaviors in soldier couples.

Format of BSRF Training

BSRF is a three-level training event consisting of two day-long workshops and culminating in an overnight retreat. The event is facilitated by a trained family life chaplain and supported by select installation agencies.

Level 1. The level-one workshop focuses on the traits needed to establish a strong marriage. The marriage education component of the training is the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP).¹

The workshop introduces participants to indicators of distress and active listening skills. During this workshop couples also complete a health-risk assessment genogram. The genogram includes any family history of tobacco and alcohol abuse, stress, or family violence. It also includes patterns of spirituality, exercise and nutritional habits.

Level 2. The level-two workshop continues with skill training. It introduces problem-solving structures and strategies to avoid conflict and increase marital satisfaction. In



addition, an interactive health promotion skill-building session includes a healthy lifestyle class, metric assessment of height, weight, body fat and blood pressure screening, skills stations where participants learn how to eat healthy, increase fitness, conduct self-breast and self-testicular examinations, and alcohol awareness. Furthermore, couples attend a individualized health and wellness session with a community health nurse focusing on risk behavior reduction and the promotion of healthy lifestyle choices.

Level 3. The final activity is a chaplain-led overnight marriage enrichment retreat that focuses on family strengths, provides an opportunity to further practice the skills presented in levels one and two, and helps couples develop goals for keeping the relationship strong. The retreat setting and multi-week process helps couples develop relationships with other couples in similar situations, thus reducing isolation and strengthening the unit support community.

Command Support and the Training Team



Building Strong and Ready Families is the unit commanders' program, supported by unit and installation staff. Command support is crucial to the successful conduct of BSRF, and is a means to demonstrate tangible command support to soldiers and their families. The commander's interest in a soldier's personal life is a morale builder. It lets soldiers and their families know "you mean something to us." The following extract from Army Regulation 600-20 reinforces the link between BSRF and unit readiness through the development of positive command climate and loyalty.

"Commanders and other leaders committed to the professional Army ethic promote a positive environment. If leaders show loyalty to their Soldiers, the Army, and the Nation, they earn the loyalty of their Soldiers. If leaders consider their Soldiers' needs and care for their well-being, and if they demonstrate genuine concern, these leaders build a positive command climate."

Army Regulation 600-20

BSRF is oriented predominantly for married soldiers who have been in units less than six months. The program is voluntary, but some unit leaders recommend participation to couples who may be in crisis or are experiencing transition difficulty. While there is no rank distinction among those who may benefit from BSRF, it is particularly suited to be a tool to facilitate the transition of first term married soldiers and families into the Army in a way that predisposes them to consider a long term relationship with the Army.

Unit chaplains are the primary staff officers responsible for conducting and coordinating the training program, under the direction and support of the unit commander. This role is well suited for the unit chaplains, who are also available after the program is over to provide ongoing

support, community opportunities, and pastoral counseling. Given the relationship between chaplains, soldiers and families, the chaplain is undoubtedly the most effective command representative to conduct the training.

Community health promotion personnel are integrated into the program as a vital link to informing newly arrived Army couples of the variety of community wellness resources that exist to help families avoid illness or problematic behavior. Some unit programs have included portions of Army Family Team Building (AFTB) into the training; this was not a design factor in the current study and could not, therefore, be adequately studied.

Building Strong and Ready Families Program Evaluation

This program evaluation was undertaken in order to learn more about the impacts of BSRF on Army families. The evaluation was commissioned by the U.S. Army through the Chief of Chaplains office. These data may be considered a preliminary analysis of BSRF impacts. Data collection is ongoing. Further, a more complex evaluation is planned; one that will use random assignment and comparisons between couples receiving BSRF and couples not receiving BSRF.

This report focuses on interim findings of BSRF using data from couples and providers who have experienced it in 11 brigades. This report focuses on the relationship quality outcomes for couples as well as attitudes and beliefs about being in the Army (e.g., morale, positive attitude about being an Army family, ability to talk constructively about the Army). Health promotion outcomes are not the focus of this report.

The findings are presented in five major categories:

- Data from couple participants:
 - Couple Functioning
 - Army Life Variables
 - Couple Feedback About the BSRF Experience
- Feedback from Providers of BSRF
- Obstacles to BSRF: Couple and Provider Perspectives

"BSRF has given their marriage a change. The spouse was being referred to command for early return of deployment. The couple renewed their marriage and is still together."

—Chaplain in Germany

All of the data collected in this evaluation are based on self-reported data from either couple participants or providers (chaplains and their staffs, and community health nurses).

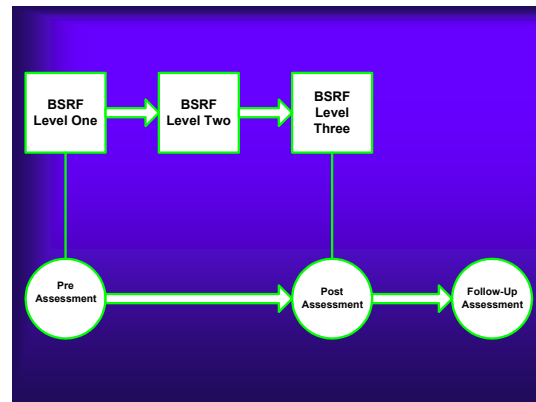
Design of This Program Evaluation

Couples taking BSRF in various brigades filled out questionnaires pre-BSRF (first thing in the morning of the first day), post-BSRF (at the end of the final day of BSRF), and one month after the ending of BSRF.

Thus, there were three time points of possible data collection from couples:

Pre-BSRF	=	Time One
Post-BSRF	=	Time Two
Follow-Up	=	Time Three

We will generally use the language “pre,” “post,” and “follow-up” throughout this report. However, any references to Time One, Time Two, or Time Three refer to pre, post, and follow-up as given above, and in various figures presented here.



Providers were encouraged to make the follow-up assessment point to an event, including reunion of the couples who had gone through BSRF together as well as recognition for the accomplishment of completing the training (including the awarding of promotion points if promised). The data collected at follow-up was collected prior to the formal beginning of the event itself. Assessments require approximately 20 minutes from participants. At all assessments, participants were assured of complete confidentiality and the protection of their responses. In particular, they were assured that their data would be sent directly to the evaluators and would never be in the possession of any one in the Army. Each participant was instructed to seal their own forms in an envelope provided with their forms, and then to place their envelopes into a box that was sealed and then sent to the evaluators. Participants chose ID numbers in such a way that partner forms could be matched later.

Providers of BSRF filled out one questionnaire of 12 pages in length. They were instructed to complete their questionnaires some time after the follow-up assessment point for couples (if that occurred) or at some point after the conclusion of the BSRF program if follow-up did not happen.

Factors Impacting Program Execution and Evaluation

The Impact of 9/11. The terrorist strikes of 9/11 happened at a time when many brigades were gearing up to conduct BSRF iterations at the end of the fiscal year. Further, the specific deployments resulting from 9/11 took many brigades completely out of the picture as far as both conducting the program and collecting data in the time frame of this evaluation. The most significant case in point is the 10th Mountain Division. The 10th Mountain had planned to contribute nearly 200 couples to this evaluation. As the reader is likely aware, the 10th Mountain division was one of the first large units to fully mobilize and be deployed as a consequence of 9/11. Chaplains from various units have suggested that deployments and operational tempo resulting from 9/11 either reduced the number of couples attending BSRF or curtailed their abilities to conduct the follow-up assessment.

The Impact of Funding. A second critical impact on the participant numbers was the lack of funding for units to conduct BSRF training iterations in fiscal year 2002. Contradictory guidance from the Joint Travel Regulatory Board and The Judge Advocate General resulted in the complete suspension of appropriated funding for BSRF iterations. Some local commanders funded the program locally in 2002 using non-appropriated funds, but for the most part the program was suspended in the majority of pilot locations.

Regardless of the impact of these factors on this program evaluation, we believe that enough data has been collected to allow for meaningful analysis of the effects presented here. Ongoing data collection is planned through the spring of 2003, which should allow for further analysis of the effects of BSRF.

As a result of these and other difficulties in bringing about the follow-up event where the time three data were collected—many fewer couples provided data for Time Three compared to those providing data at Time One and Two.

Couples providing data at Time One or pre-BSRF:	380
Couples providing data at Time Two or post-BSRF:	230
Couples providing data at Time Three or follow-up:	60

For many of the couple outcomes, results are presented based on pre to post-BSRF data only, and then also from pre to post to follow-up. In other words, findings are usually presented for two time points, and then also for three time points. We usually present both the two time point and three time point findings in the major figures of couple outcome. We do this because of the fact that the two time point analyses are based on many more couples than the three time point findings. In general, the two time point findings and three time point findings are entirely consistent with each other, but the two time point figures are based on the 200 plus couples who completed pre and post, and the three time point figures are based on the roughly 60 couples who completed pre, post, and follow-up. Where findings are presented for pre to post to follow-up, but not simple pre to post, the pre to post findings were not statistically significant.

The greatest single reason for the attrition of couples over time appears to be the increased operational tempo and the associated training and operational requirements. Furthermore, the number of couples at follow-up may also be low because those data collection points were associated with a suggested “event” where providers of BSRF bring couples back together. Some providers may have been prevented by circumstances from bringing about the event suggested for the follow-up, and some may not have made the extra effort to bring this event about.

Important Note on Attrition Possible Effects. We looked for differences between couples who provided data at all three time points and those providing data at only one or two time points. We found no differences between these couples based on their pre-BSRF scores. Across both Army life variables and relationship quality variables, there is simply *no* evidence that factors associated with the characteristics of couples themselves made it more or less likely that they would provide data at all time points. We therefore believe that the data suggest that the reasons for attrition had to do with Army developments such as operations tempo and deployments, or

issues related to the functioning of providers themselves, and not for reasons having to do with characteristics of the couples. However, it is possible that some unmeasured variables affect attrition and that if they had been measured, it would affect interpretation of some findings. *Overall, we do not see evidence here that bias was introduced by the attrition pattern, and the main result of the attrition is that the analyses including all three time points are based on fewer couples than the two time point analyses, which would make those analyses somewhat less powerful for detecting changes over time.*² The fact that there are many significant findings of change out to follow-up, despite the smaller sample that has data at all three time points, is evidence of robust effects.

Description of Couples in the Sample

The following briefly describes the characteristics of the sample of participant couples.

<u>Military Status</u>		<u>Rank</u>	<u>Other Characteristics</u>
• Males	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 85% (n = 369) were active duty ○ 6% (n = 25) were not active duty³ 	• Males <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 8% PVT ○ 19% PFC ○ 41% SPC ○ 28% Jr. NCO ○ 2% Sr. NCO ○ 2% Company Grade Officer ○ <1% Field Grade Officer 	• Age <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 17 to 45 years (Males Mean = 24.7, Females Mean = 23.8)
• Females	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 24% (n = 106) were active duty ○ 68% (n = 296) were not active duty 	• Females <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 7% PVT ○ 23% PFC ○ 43% SPC ○ 25% Jr. NCO ○ 2% Sr. NCO ○ 2% Company Grade Officer 	• Marital Status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 96% married ○ 3% engaged ○ 1% living together
• Ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 48 % Caucasian ○ 19% African American ○ 13% Hispanic ○ 1% Asian ○ 1% Native American ○ 10% Other ○ 8% did not disclose 		• Income <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Range: \$5,000 to \$70,000 ○ Mode: \$20,000 to \$29,000

Technical Note: Significance, Effect Sizes, and Scaling of Figures

Note to reader: The information in the next section can be skipped if you are mostly interested only in the general picture of the findings, and are not interested in some of the more technical details about how the data is handled or depicted. For the reader interested in a fuller understanding of key issues affecting the analysis and interpretation of these findings, please read on. Otherwise, you might move ahead to the section entitled “Data from Couples.”

Statistical Significance. All findings presented here are statistically significant unless specifically noted otherwise. This means that the findings presented here are unlikely to be due to chance, and as such, they represent actual changes on the variables measured in this program.⁴

However, it is important to note that findings can be statistically significant but represent anything from very small changes to very large changes on a given measure. Throughout this report, we attempt to give the reader an indication of the strength of the effects by how we describe the results. On most of the measures assessed over time, we have calculated effect sizes, which put the magnitude of an effect on a scale of 1 standard deviation. Effect sizes allow one to compare strength of findings across different measures regardless of how those measures were originally scaled. Many of the panels presenting findings in this report contain information at the bottom about effect sizes, for the statistically minded reader. For example, a finding with an effect size of .44 means that the difference being depicted amounts to 44% of one standard deviation worth of change (a moderate to strong effect in this kind of research).⁵

Figures and Scaling. Figures can be developed in ways that are misleading with regard to how much or little change or difference was actually found. For example, a 3 point difference on a 5 point scale could be statistically meaningless while a .5 point difference on a 10 point scale could represent a large effect or change and appear insignificant. In keeping with the utility of the effect size metric mentioned just above, we present the major findings of differences over time by making the scale on the Y-axis of most charts correspond roughly to 1 standard deviation on that measure. This was done for all figures showing changes from pre to post-BSRF, or pre to post-BSRF to follow-up. Thus, depictions with differences that appear larger are actually larger in terms of the amount of “effect” and differences that appear smaller are truly smaller. Furthermore, in terms of how couples or providers actually used the measures, the figures are adjusted in such a way that important statistically significant differences are not obscured by how much of the scale respondents tended to use.⁶

Response Scales. Except where noted otherwise, the response choices on many of the measures used here are on seven point scales. Typically, the average of the items for such scales is what is presented. For example, a person marking a 4, a 5, and a 6 on a three item scale would get a score of 5 for that measure. The scores in the figures are averages for the group. Therefore, except where noted otherwise, the highest possible score on most of the measures is 7 and the lowest possible score is 1.

Male vs. Female, Active Duty vs. Non-Active Duty. Most of the couples included in these analyses had an active duty male (approximately 85%⁷). Approximately 24% of the couples participating had an active duty female in the relationship. Approximately 18% had both an active duty male as well as an active duty female. For some Army variable specific analyses presented here, there are too few active duty female respondents to compare active duty females with active duty males on responses. Such comparisons, looking in more detail at differential effects based on gender of active duty respondents can be attempted in the future when more data are available.

III. DATA FROM COUPLES

Findings on Couple Functioning

Couples completed measures of their relationship quality at all time points.⁸ These measures included assessment of relationship satisfaction, confidence, interpersonal commitment to one's partner, and both positive and negative interaction—which other research suggest is a very potent predictor of long-term couple outcomes.⁹

Summary of findings in this section:

- Couples showed modest to strong gains on many measures of couple functioning from pre-BSRF to post-BSRF and at the one month follow-up.
- Couples reported increases in relationship satisfaction and relationship confidence.
- Couples reported decreases in various kinds of negative interaction, including escalation, invalidation, shouting, and withdrawal—patterns that much research demonstrates as associated with marital failure.¹⁰
- Couples reported increases in the use of constructive strategies for managing negative emotions, such as taking time-outs when things got heated.

Relationship Satisfaction

Couples taking BSRF showed modest gains in relationship satisfaction from pre-BSRF to post-BSRF. Figure 1 displays the mean change in satisfaction for the pre-post sample and also for the sample with follow-up data available. These gains are statistically significant but small in size.¹¹ The data also indicates that, on average, the males in these Army couples are slightly more satisfied than females in their relationships. This may, however, vary by type of couple and merits further study.

SAMPLE QUESTION

How satisfied are you with your marriage (or relationship)?

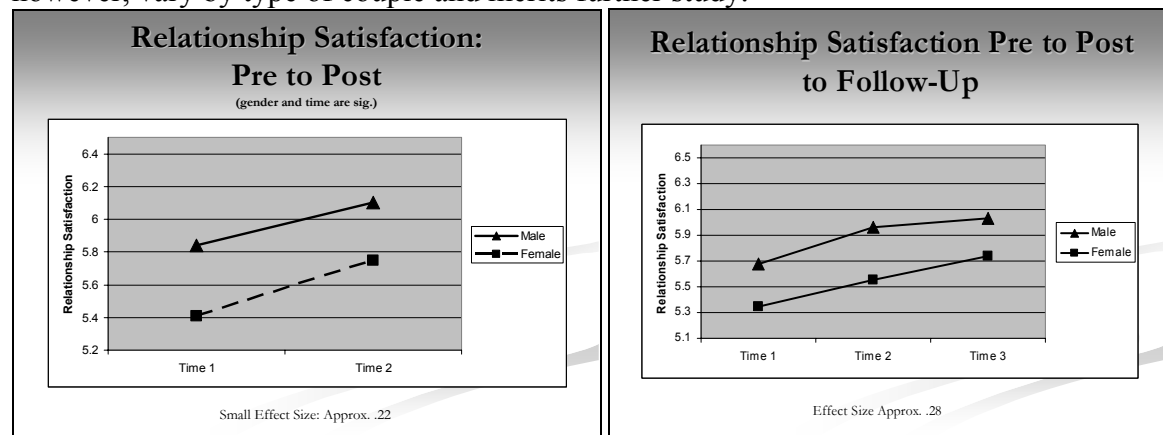


Figure 1: Ratings of Relationship Satisfaction over Time

Negative Interaction and Poorly Managed Conflict

Couples taking BSRF reported solid gains in the quality of their communication from pre-BSRF to post-BSRF. These findings include the reduction of negative interaction patterns that are called “Danger Signs” in PREP. As measured here, they include escalation (little arguments growing into larger conflicts, shouting, name calling), invalidation (put-downs, insults, etc.), withdrawal, negative interpretations, and feeling like the partners are on opposite teams. The highest score possible on this scale is 33 and the lowest is 11.

Respondents were asked to circle one of three responses for each such question, as follows (the average total score for 11 such items is depicted in Figure 2):

Use the following 3-point scale to rate how often you and your mate or partner experience the following:

- 1 - Almost never or never
- 2 - Once in while
- 3 - Frequently

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Little arguments escalate into ugly fights with accusations, criticisms, name calling, or bringing up past hurts.

When we have a problem to solve, it is like we are on opposite teams.

When we argue, one of us withdraws...that is, doesn't want to talk about it anymore; or leaves the scene.

My partner criticizes or belittles my opinions, feelings, or desires.

I insult or swear at my partner.

My partner shouts or yells at me.

Figure 2 displays the overall mean ratings for the scale used to measure negative interaction danger signs.

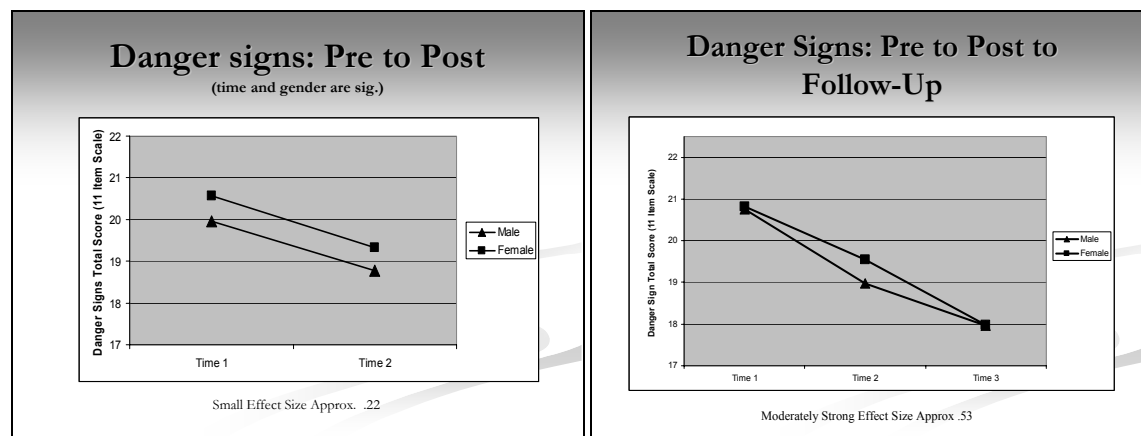


Figure 2: Ratings of Interaction Danger Signs over Time

The smaller sample that continues through all three time points shows reduction in negative interaction continuing from the assessment right after BSRF to approximately one month later, with the total reduction in negative interaction exhibited for that group being substantial in magnitude. This is evidence of gains continuing in the month following BSRF.

Figure 3 displays findings across the three time points using a different, but comparable measure of negative interaction. Similar patterns can be seen, with couples tending to report a reduction of these specific negative interaction patterns over time.

Sample questions fall into two categories, invalidation and withdrawal:

Invalidation

- *I feel my partner puts down my ideas.*
- *I feel my partner puts down my feelings.*

Withdrawal

- *I find myself pulling back when my partner wants to discuss an issue or concern.*
- *I clam up when we disagree.*

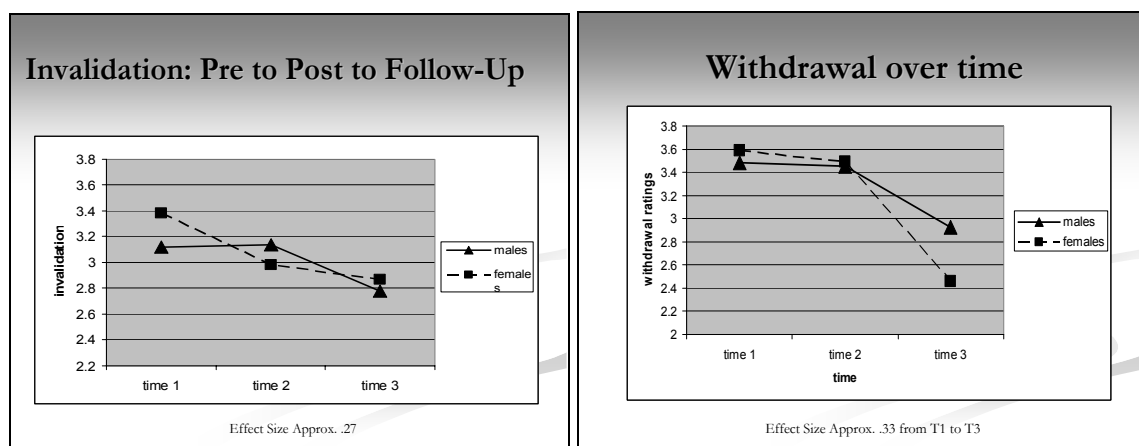


Figure 3. Ratings over Time for Invalidation and Withdrawal

As can be seen in the second panel of Figure 3, the withdrawal data suggest a sort of sleeper effect. It may well be that it takes more time than what occurs from pre to post-BSRF for a change in the degree to which one or both partner withdrawal is evident to the partners in the relationship, but changes in it become evident by one month following taking BSRF.

Constructive Communication and Conflict Management

Since negative interaction is such a potent destroyer of marriages, it is very important for couples to have ways to stop or reduce conflicts once things get heated. One key skill taught in the PREP component of BSRF is how to use Time Out, which gives couples an agreed upon way to exit from negative patterns before they damage their relationship.

Figure 4 displays the data on the couples' reports of the use of Time Out over time. As can be seen, there is a modest increase in the use

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

When discussions threaten to boil over, we stop them and take a time out.

When our discussions begin to get out of hand, we agree to stop them and talk later.

of Time Out from pre to post-BSRF, and a large increase in reported use by males that holds up to follow-up.

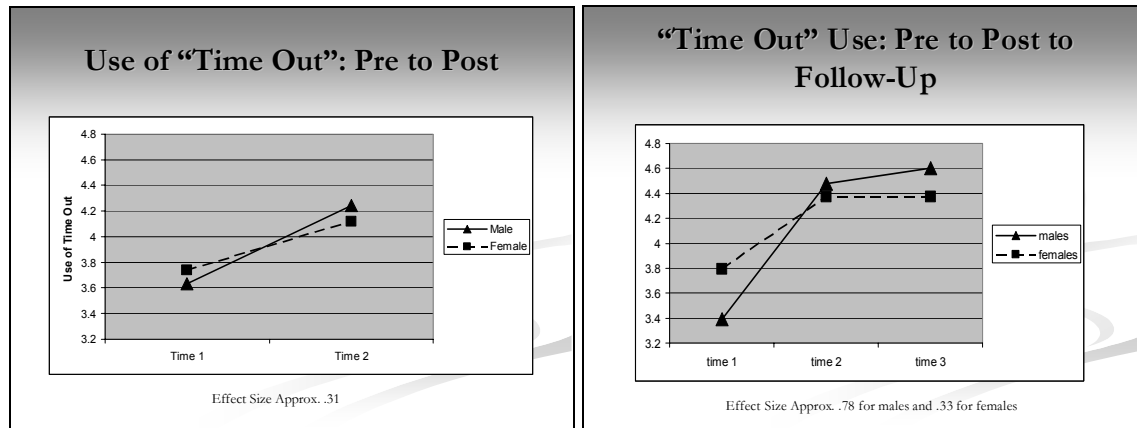


Figure 4. Use of Time Out

One of the key listening skills that couples are taught in PREP is paraphrasing, which is a key component of the Speaker/Listener Technique.¹²

On average, the couples reported only small increases in the use of paraphrasing from pre to post-BSRF. For those with data at three time points, an increase in use of the skill was reported through follow-up, with females in particular reporting strong gains over time. Figure 5 displays these results. These data suggest ongoing and growing benefits from taking BSRF for some couples, with stronger effects observed at the follow-up time point. As with the withdrawal data in Figure 3, the paraphrasing data suggest the possibility of a sleeper effect, with stronger gains taking hold over time as the couple has a greater chance to integrate elements of what they learned in BSRF into their relationship.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

When we discuss relationship issues, I show my partner that I am listening by repeating back what I heard.

I summarize what my partner says in order to make sure I understand him/her.

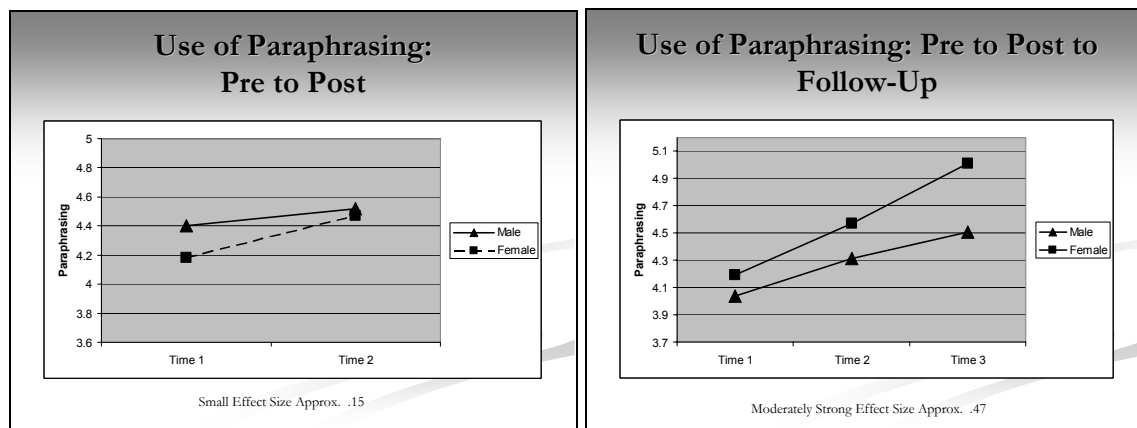


Figure 5. Use of the Listening Skill of Paraphrasing

Confidence in the Future of Their Relationship

It is very important for couples to have confidence in the future of their marriages. While couples still desire to make marriages last a lifetime, they have greater doubts than ever before that this is possible. They tend to lack confidence both in marriage as an institution as well as their own abilities to make it work.

BSRF is designed in part to increase confidence by increasing skills for handling the inevitable conflicts in marriage by educating couples about the importance of a long-term view of marriage. For this reason, we assessed their confidence in the future of their marriages. Confidence, as measured, includes confidence that the relationship will last and also that they have what it takes to handle problems and issues as they arise in the future.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

I feel good about our prospects to make this relationship work for a lifetime.

We have the skills a couple needs to make a marriage last.

I am very confident when I think of our future together.

As can be seen from Figure 6, couples taking BSRF reported strong gains in confidence from pre to post-BSRF, with those gains being maintained at the follow-up assessment point.

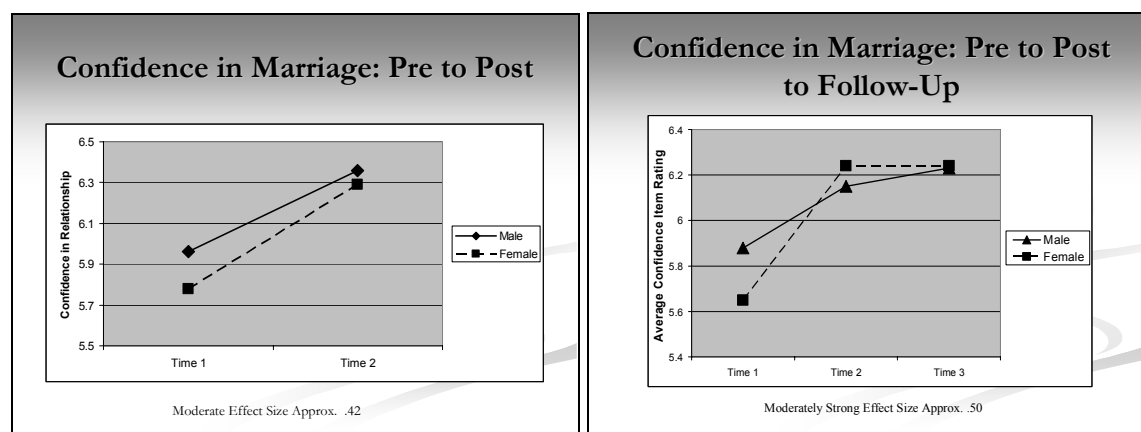


Figure 6. Confidence in Marriage

Interpersonal Commitment

There were no statistically significant differences on level of interpersonal commitment between partners. This is not surprising given that couples in this sample, on average, scored very highly on this dimension (average of 6.5 on a 7 point scale for these items). In essence, they are already scoring highly on this dimension.

In the section of the report dealing with the specific impacts of BSRF as couples see them, couples strongly endorsed items that suggest renewed and deepened desire to act out their already high levels of commitment

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

I like to think of my partner and me more in terms of "us" and "we" than "me" and "him/her."

I want this relationship to stay strong no matter what rough times we may encounter.

in ways that are protective of their marriages over time. With these Army couples so strongly endorsing overall dedication to one another, there was little room for movement upwards on this measure in this sample.

Findings on Army Life Variables

As part of the program evaluation, couples taking BSRF answered many different kinds of questions pertaining to life as a couple and family in the Army. These questions were designed to assess any specific effects of participating in BSRF that may directly affect the experience or perception of quality of life in the Army, as well as elements of identification and morale within the Army for the active duty member of the couples.

Summary of findings in this section:

- *Army Family Morale.* Couples reported gains in several dimensions that could be taken as indicators of morale as a family with regard to life in the Army:
 - Couples reported gains in how positive they feel about their ability to make a successful life in the Army.
 - Couples reported gains in the perception that the Army is concerned and supportive of Army families.
 - Couples reported gains in their ability to talk constructively about Army issues that affect them.
- Among various Army leaders, couples reported that they saw chaplains as the most supportive of Army families. Ratings of perceived supportiveness of chaplains increased further after taking BSRF.
- No changes in general (not family related) Army morale were found in this short-term evaluation.
- No changes in the degree to which problems at home affected performance of Army duties were reported. However, problems and issues at work (Army duties) were reported to be having less of a negative impact on home life following BSRF.
- A very modest increase in the likelihood of remaining in the Army was found on one measure while another measure showed no effect on re-enlistment sentiments. Of course, this is a long-term goal of BSRF, and this program evaluation covers a short period of time.

Army Family Morale

There are two different ways to conceptualize morale as related to this program evaluation. First, there is morale in the traditional sense of morale of the soldier about the Army in general. Second, there is the morale of an Army family about their life, or term, in the Army. This section focuses on findings related to the latter type of morale.

Satisfaction with Being an Army Family

Couples were asked about their sense that they could have a good life together in the Army. It was hypothesized that couples might make gains in their sense of confidence in making Army life work.

As can be seen in Figure 7, couples reported increases in overall satisfaction about Army life following BSRF, and the gains appear to increase through the follow-up assessment.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

We have adjusted well to being an "Army Family."

We have the skills to make a life in the Army.

A couple can have a good life together with a partner in the Army.

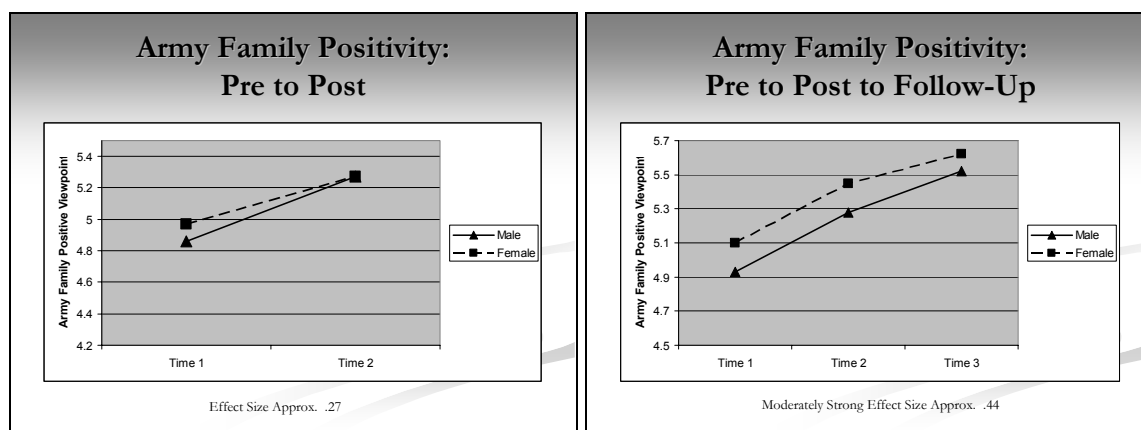


Figure 7. Army Family Positivity

Army Concern and Support for Families

Couples were asked about the degree to which they felt that the Army had concern, support, and respect for Army families. Whereas the dimension in the prior section deals with a couple's perception of how well they are doing as a couple in the Army, these questions assess the degree to which couples perceive the Army as being supportive of their marriages and families.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

I am satisfied with the concern and support the Army or Army leaders show for my family.

The Army is responsive to my family's needs.

The Army shows respect for spouses of soldiers.

Figure 8 displays the results for the analyses of this dimension. In this dimension, there were no statistically significant pre to post-BSRF changes, but solid gains were reported by the one month follow-up for those couples contributing data at all three time points.

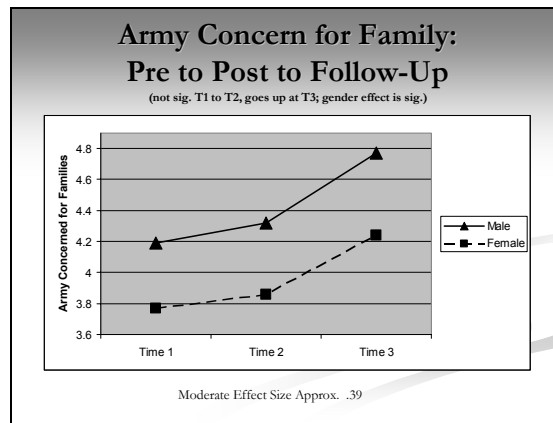


Figure 8. Perception of Army Concern and Support

The fact that the gains on this dimension are not reported until the follow-up raises and possibility that the nature of the follow-up event itself may play a role in affecting couples' perceptions that the Army is concerned about Army families. This possibility will be discussed in the implications section. As can also be seen in Figure 8, men perceive greater concern and support for families in the Army than do women.

Ability to Talk About Army Life Issues

For couples to cope well with the rigors of Army life, they need to be able to talk about the various kinds of issues that come up as a result of being a couple in the family. This could be one key way in which longer term readiness might be impacted by programs such as BSRF. As part of the program evaluation, we asked couples how well they could talk about Army life, hypothesizing that couples would report gains in being able to talk constructively about the Army.

As can be seen in Figure 9, couples reported modest gains on this dimension from pre to post-BSRF, with the couples who filled out measures at all time points reporting strong gains through the follow-up assessment point. The data in the second chart of Figure 9 suggests that the gains in being comfortable when talking about Army life are stronger for women than for men. We do not know if this means that women are changing their behavior more or seeing more behavior change in the relationship, but it is clear that the women in the group for which we have data at all three time points believe they have made very strong gains in this key ability.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

I am comfortable talking with my spouse about Army related concerns.

My spouse and I have difficulty talking about concerns related to my career in the Army (reverse score).

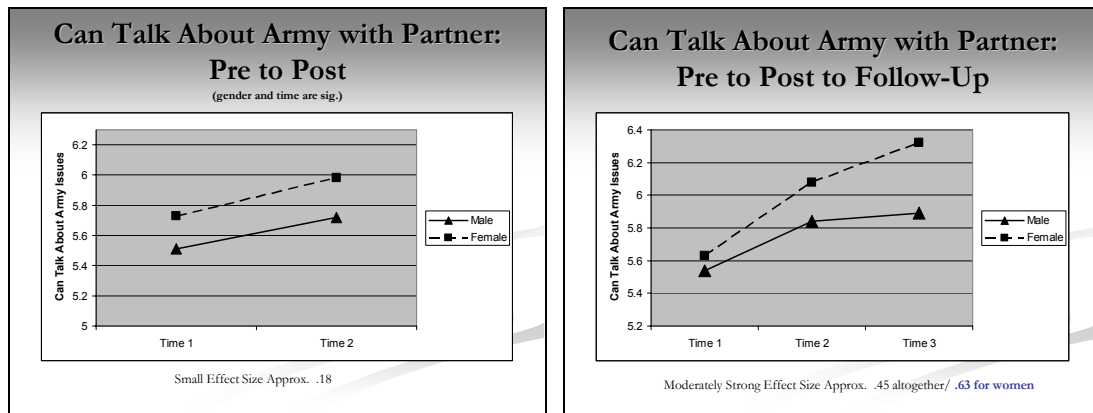


Figure 9. Ability to Talk Well About Army Life

Perception of Leadership Support

Couples were asked about how supportive four key types of Army leaders are of Army families. The four key leader groups rated on this question were:

- Officers in high post/installation positions
- Officers at my place of duty
- NCOs at my place of duty
- Chaplains

Specifically, the couples were asked this question:

How supportive and caring of Army families are the following leaders at your current location?

1	2	3	4	5
Very Unsupportive	Unsupportive	Neutral	Supportive	Very Supportive

As seen in Figure 10, couples rated chaplains as being the most supportive of Army families of all the leader types.¹³

While there are not significant differences between ratings among the latter three leader types in Figure 10, the difference between the ratings for chaplains and other leader types is quite large. Further, the difference between male and female ratings across all leader types is statistically significant. Hence, both men and women perceive chaplains as more supportive of Army families compared to Army leaders—which makes good sense as this is an important part of their specific mission and as they are often directly involved with the presentation of BSRF. Further, men, in general, see Army leaders as more supportive than women in general.

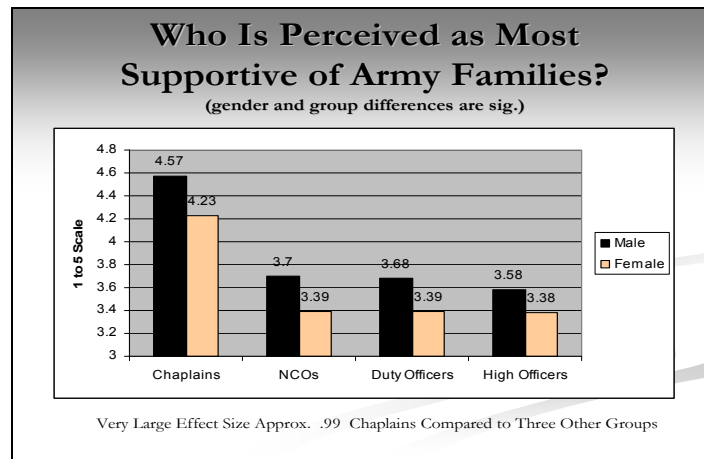


Figure 10. Perception of Leadership Support of Army Families by Males and Females

If chaplains are perceived as very supportive of Army families, does BSRF increase the perception? Figure 11 displays the answer, which is “yes,” at least for the pre to post-BSRF period (follow-up data fell just short of significance) This is not true for ratings of other leaders, hence, BSRF has a specific effect of increasing the perception among Army couples that chaplains are very supportive of their families.

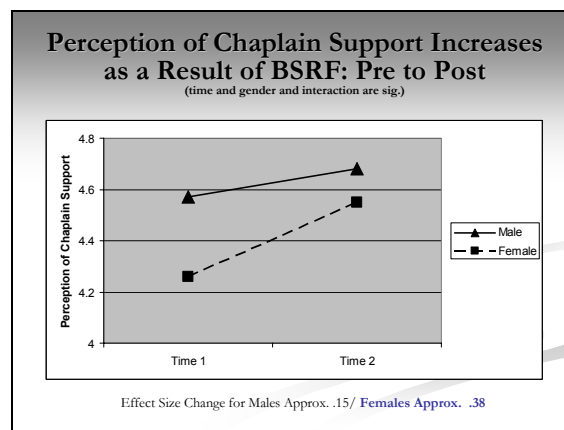


Figure 11. Perception of Chaplain Support Pre to Post-BSRF

As can be seen, the gains in perception of support are greatest for women. Hence, BSRF has a significant and strong impact on the perception of women that chaplains are supportive of Army families.

As another indicator of the role chaplains can play in the life of Army couples, we asked couples at all time points whether or not they had seen a chaplain or a therapist at some point for help with their relationship. Figure 12 displays these percentages for the first time point, where we have the most data available.

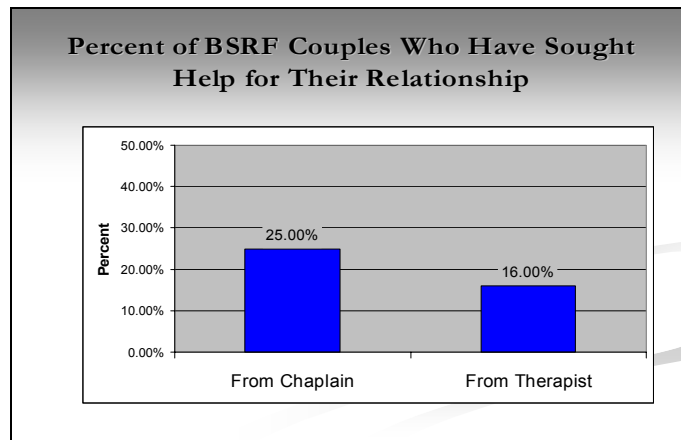


Figure 12. Sought Help for Relationship

There are several factors that complicate interpretation of these data. First, while we intended that people respond to this question apart from the specific contact with chaplains in the BSRF context, the actual question asked did not make this explicit, so it is possible that some people may have responded based on their BSRF experience. However, the data suggest that most (if not all) interpreted the question correctly.

What the above data do show, clearly, is that Army couples are more likely to see an Army chaplain for help with their relationship than a therapist. Other data, not part of this program evaluation, suggest that couples in the Army who have participated in premarital counseling are more likely to subsequently seek help if struggles arise—which is considered a very positive outcome of relationship education services.¹⁴ BSRF provides a unique opportunity for chaplains and other providers to be visible in ways that help couples to be aware of many other services which they may have not previously known were available to them.

Readiness: When Home Goes to Work

It was hypothesized that improving the functioning of Army couples would improve the readiness of the soldiers in couple relationships. In line with this, readiness was assessed in two different ways in this evaluation. First, active-duty participants were asked directly about their sense of readiness by asking them the following question:

If you were to go to war today, how well prepared are you to perform the tasks in your wartime job?

- 1 Very well prepared*
- 2 Well prepared*
- 3 Neither well nor poorly prepared*
- 4 Poorly prepared*
- 5 Very poorly prepared*

The second measure that could be taken as an index of readiness was asked along the lines of what family scholars call “spillover.” For Army couples, like all couples, there are two kinds of spillover that can affect the quality of life and productivity of work: (1) home-to-work spillover, where problems at home affect the presence or performance of the employee at work; and (2)

work-to-home spillover where problems and stress from work affect the relationships and quality of life at home. This first type of spillover above represents another window to understanding readiness. For this first type of spillover, sample items include:

- *Conflicts with my spouse impact my day-to-day functioning at work.*
- *Marital or family concerns distract me from my Army duties.*

On both the direct measure of readiness and the spillover measure, there were no statistically significant changes from pre to post BSRF. While there could be longer term effects on readiness that are related to how one is doing in their marriage, it cannot be concluded that BSRF has a short-term effect on readiness in a way that is captured by the self-report measures used here. Indeed, it is reasonable to assert that if readiness is impacted directly by BSRF, it is likely through a longer term mechanism than could be assessed in this shorter program evaluation.

Spillover: When Work Comes Home

As noted above, the second type of spillover reflects the degree to which problems and stressors at work affect home life. For the second type of spillover, only one question was asked:

- *At home, I am so tired or preoccupied with my work that I don't have much time or energy left for my marriage and/or family.*

There were significant changes in work-to-home spillover as rated by active duty males. Figure 13 portrays the changes from pre to post, and also for pre to post to follow-up.

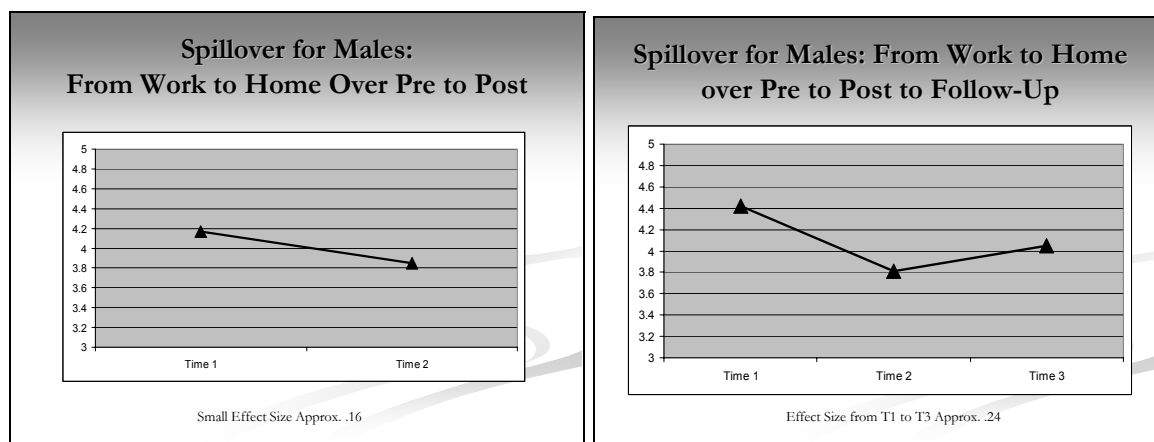


Figure 13. Spillover: From Work-To-Home Stress as Rated by Active Duty Males

This data suggests that, following participation in BSRF, there is a modest but statistically significant reduction in the degree to which active duty males perceive the stresses at work to be negatively impacting their home life. The latter chart of Figure 10 portrays both the reduction of spillover from pre to post-BSRF, and, perhaps, a slight increase in spillover by the time of the follow-up assessment. The difference between the initial level of spillover and that rated at follow-up is still statistically significant; hence, the gain is mostly maintained.

Active duty females show even greater reductions in their average ratings of this sort of spillover over three time points, though the differences are not statistically significant, most likely because we only have data on 15 active duty females for all three time points (therefore, the data are not displayed). Future analyses based on more couples may show those differences to be statistically significant, like what was found for males.

Based on these results, we hypothesized that changes in the overall sense that one can manage Army life as a couple (Army Family Positivity, above) and also talk constructively with one's partner about Army issues (Ability to talk about Army Issues, above) would be linked to these changes in ratings of the degree to which Army work stresses affect home life. In other words, we asked this question of the data: Are gains in a sense of competence at being able to handle Army life related to reductions in this kind of spillover—when such reductions occurred? Analyses confirmed that this is so.¹⁵ Those who are most likely to say that the stress of Army duty is having less negative impact on home-life are those who report improvements after BSRF in their ability to handle Army life well—as a couple. These findings are noteworthy as other research has indicated that married soldiers staying in active duty service experience less work-family conflict than soldiers who are leaving.¹⁶

"During my current deployment—now 8 months after our BSRF event—several soldiers have mentioned the training and how it has benefited them during the separation. One recently told me that he and his wife put some new priorities on their relationship after the training to include time spent each week talking with each other. They have struggled but have been persistent in maintaining that time of sharing while separated, and it has actually spurred growth in their marriage while deployed."

—a Chaplain at Ft. Drum

Re-Enlistment and Remaining in Army Life

Retention of soldiers is essential to ensuring that the U. S. Army maintains a highly qualified and capable force. This becomes more critical as the Army transforms itself, placing a higher premium on retaining future soldiers whose technological and war fighting skills will become more advanced. Studies generally suggest that decisions to stay in active duty service are multiply determined, being influenced by basic pay, operations tempo, deployments, quality of leadership, satisfaction with military life, personal and family factors, and civilian job opportunities¹⁷. Some of these factors—such as basic pay, operations tempo, and civilian opportunities—are beyond the impact of BSRF, whereas others—such as perceived quality of leadership and family factors—may be impacted by the BSRF program.

To examine the question about chances of re-enlisting, respondents were asked about their thoughts related to re-enlistment in several different ways within the evaluation. First, within the context of the overall measurement of morale, two questions in particular asked about re-enlistment. They were:

- *I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in the Army.*
- *I am likely to stay in the Army at the end of my current obligation.*

Only active duty participants answered these questions about re-enlistment. Figure 14 displays the findings for active duty males and active duty females, separately. Only the pre to post-BSRF findings were significant for males while only the analysis using all three time points was significant for females.

As can be seen in Figure 14, while the average score for males went up from pre to post-BSRF, the gain was very slight. In contrast, the gain was more substantial as rated by female active duty soldiers. Note that the latter analysis is only based on the 15 females who were both active duty and for whom we had data at all three time points.¹⁸ The male findings out to the follow-up point may also have been significant if we had a larger sample size with which to measure for the effect.

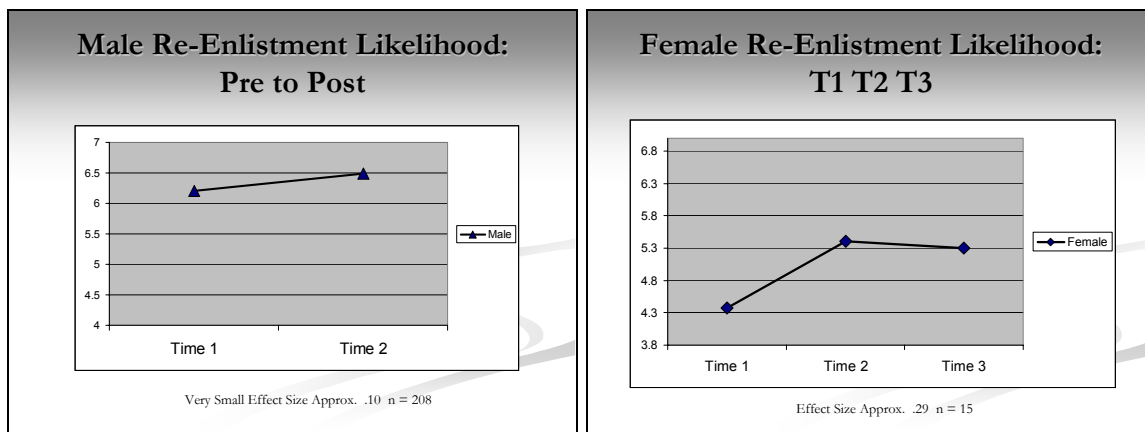


Figure 14. Attitudes towards Remaining in Army Life

The other way in which participants gauged the likelihood of re-enlistment was by using this item:

How likely are you to stay in the Army at the end of your current obligation?

- ___ (0 in 10) No chance
- ___ (1 in 10) Very slight possibility
- ___ (2 in 10) Slight possibility
- ___ (3 in 10) Some possibility
- ___ (4 in 10) Fair possibility
- ___ (5 in 10) Fairly good possibility
- ___ (6 in 10) Good possibility
- ___ (7 in 10) Probable
- ___ (8 in 10) Very probable
- ___ (9 in 10) Almost sure
- ___ (10 in 10) Certain

On this measure of re-enlistment, there were no differences reported in the likelihood of re-enlisting subsequent to taking BSRF. While the group average did not change on this item, that does not mean that participant's ratings did not change from Pre to Post. Thirty-seven percent of active duty person's scores stayed the same from pre to post-BSRF on this question, leaving 63%

that changed upward or downward on this question. We next looked at the degree to which changes on this variable over time were linked with changes that resulted from going through BSRF.¹⁹

While evidence of direct, short-term changes in the likelihood of re-enlisting as a result of taking BSRF are very modest, those who increased in their rated odds of re-enlisting are those who, on average, also increased in their sense that (a) they had what it takes to make it as a couple in the Army and (b) that the Army has concern for Army families. This evidence suggests that strengthening the effect of BSRF on those dimensions may be one way that BSRF could impact re-enlistment in the future. Such an approach would be consistent with findings that satisfaction with military life is strongly linked with intentions to stay in the military. Further study may reveal the impact of age and career status on the respondents; some may not be able to see a career inclination others may have self-selected into the career and respond differently.

Couple Feedback on BSRF Experience and Effects

Global and specific ratings of the experience of BSRF were gathered from the couples who participated. These include ratings of overall satisfaction with the program and its components as well as ratings of the impact of specific program content.

Summary of findings in this section:

- Couples reported very high satisfaction with BSRF.
- Couples strongly endorsed the sentiment that they would recommend BSRF to others.
- Couples reported the strongest impacts of BSRF on the quality of their own relationships.

Global Satisfaction with BSRF

For each of the three main components of BSRF (Relationship Building, Health Promotion, and Spiritual Encouragement and Direction), couples were asked at post assessment how satisfied they were with each component. There are other data that will be analyzed related to the health promotion aims of BSRF that are not the focus of this report.

SAMPLE QUESTION

*Overall, how satisfied are you with each of the following components of the building Strong and Ready Families Program?
Please circle a response for each question.*

Relationship building with my partner (PREP)
1 Very dissatisfied
2 Dissatisfied
3 Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4 Satisfied
5 Very satisfied

Figure 15 displays the mean ratings of satisfaction for all three major components of BSRF. As can be seen, couples gave the highest ratings to the relationship building aspect and the lowest to the spiritual aspects, though the difference in these ratings are likely of no practical significance. Couples gave high marks to each of the components of BSRF. We also examined the program satisfaction ratings with regard to race/ethnicity, comparing majority (White) and minority (Black and Hispanic) respondents. Males and females from the three different groups gave similarly high program satisfaction ratings to all components of BSRF, and where differences or

trends did emerge, minority respondents tended to report higher, not lower, levels of satisfaction. For example, minority males rated the spiritual component higher than majority males. Black females tended to rate the health promotion component higher than White or Hispanic females.

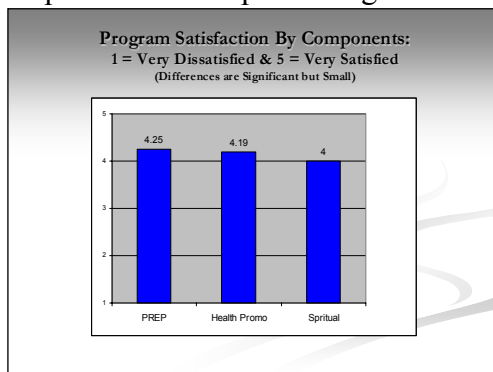


Figure 15. Satisfaction with BSRF Components

Another indicator of satisfaction with BSRF is represented in the degree to which couples would recommend it to others. Among many possible impacts of BSRF described in the next section, a statement about the likelihood of recommending BSRF to friends was the one rated as the likeliest result of having participated. In other words, couples very strongly endorsed the idea that they would recommend BSRF to others (Figure 16).

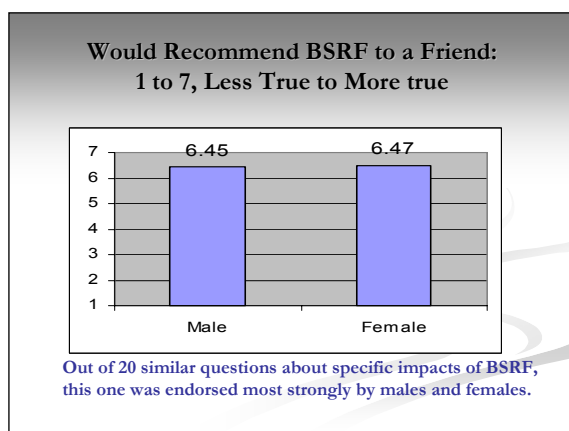


Figure 16. Would Recommend BSRF to a Friend

"Young couples approach me even 6 months after the program and thank me for the program. They give me a look of extreme gratitude and relief. Similar, perhaps, to the look and response an ER doctor might receive."

—a chaplain at Ft. Wainwright

Impact Comparisons: Couples' Ratings of What Is Least Likely vs. Most Likely To Change as a Result of Participating

Participants were asked to rate 20 things that might change resulting from BSRF. These 20 items encompassed the possibility of changes in communication, investment (commitment), morale, attention to protecting the positive side of their relationships, and attitudes about the Army, re-enlistment, and so forth. These questions were designed to assess the participants' assessment of the impact of BSRF on

Sample questions:

As a result of taking the BSRF program..

I feel more confident we will stay together in the years to come.

I will invest more time in our relationship.

I have the tools to talk without fighting about issues that will come up.

I feel more support from the Army for my family.

various dimensions in a way that could be compared. These ratings were not collected at pre-assessment, only post-assessment, because of the format (see below).

Figure 17 displays the statements participants said, on average, were *most true* as a result of taking BSRF. Figure 18 displays the statements participants said, on average, were *least true* as a result of taking BSRF. Both men and women gave nearly identical average ratings to these types of items, regardless of whether they were active duty military or civilian.

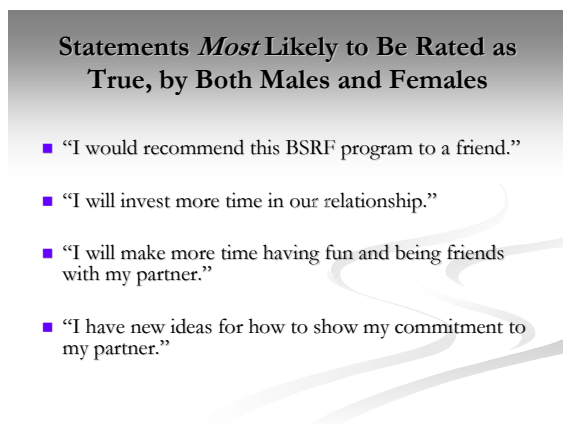


Figure 17. Statements Most Likely to Be Rated as True, by Both Males and Females

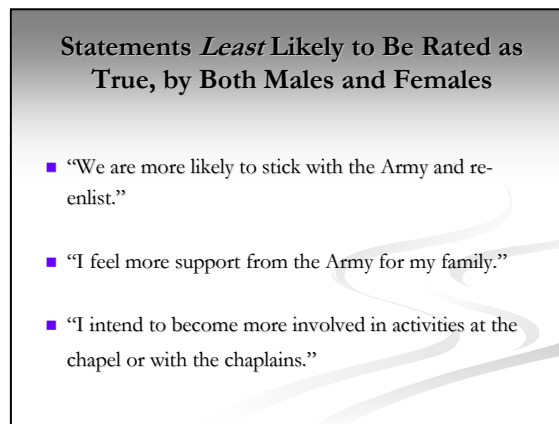


Figure 18. Statements Least Likely to Be Rated as True, by Both Males and Females

The two panels in figure 19 provide a clear example of how much more likely couples were to say that BSRF impacted their relationship than that it impacted their feelings about Army life.

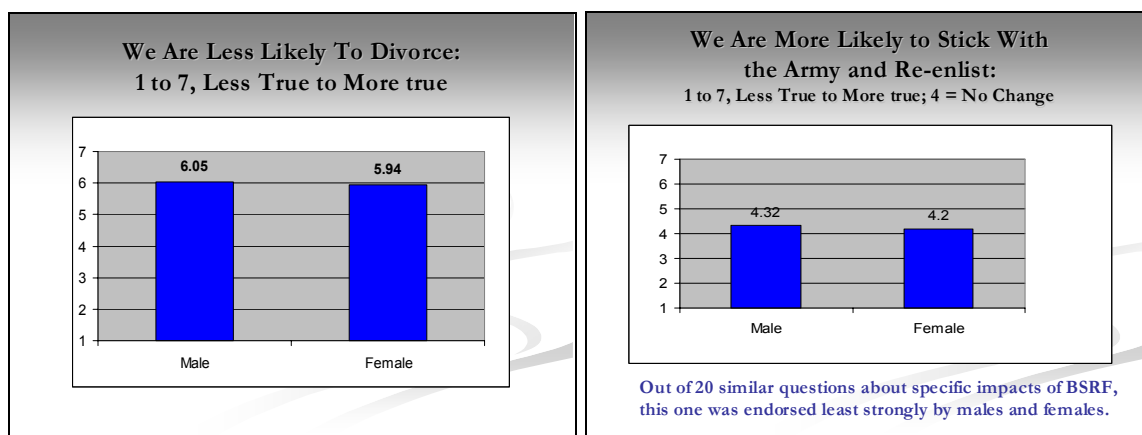


Figure 19. Sample Relationship Impact vs. Army Specific Impact

As this example portrays, couples were far more likely to say impacts of BSRF were likely on their relationship than on their involvement with the Army. This is not surprising, since the specific targets of BSRF are mostly about couple and individual functioning and less directly about specific attitudes and beliefs about the Army. BSRF is conceptualized as program that improves and sustains the institutional strength of The Army *by* strengthening the newly forming marriages of its first-term soldiers. Data presented previously indicates that BSRF impacts well-

being through improvements in couple's positivity about family life in the Army, couple's ability to talk about Army life, and in their perceptions of command support. Future research possibly can track actual long-term Army involvement outcomes such as re-enlistments and early return of dependents.

The questions asked about what impacts were most likely can be analyzed in different manners, with differing impressions resulting. The preceding analyses are based on the average ratings given by participants to the statements presented, with the “most likely” and “least likely” rankings being based on those averages. Such items can also be analyzed simply from the perspective of whether or not a respondent says a statement is more likely, less likely, or no change.

Figure 20 shows the degree to which people thought key statements about the Army were more true or less true as a result of taking BSRF. While all of these items were less likely to be rated as true by participants than other statements of this sort, one can see that even on the statement least likely to be rated as true, more participants said it was more true that they would re-enlist than said that it was less true.

The impact ratings produce findings that are very similar to the direct ratings of either relationship dynamics or Army variables covered earlier in this report. Overall, there is the clearest evidence for changes in couple functioning, matching where couples say the greatest impacts of BSRF lie. Conversely, there is only weak evidence of impacts on dimensions such as retention—at least in the short run—paralleling what couples said was least likely to change.

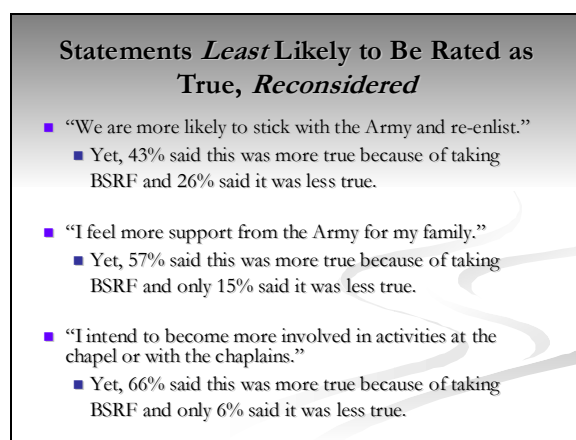


Figure 20. Impacts On Army Related Variables

Factors Tested As Possibly Affecting Couple Gains

We tested four key factors for the degree of effect they had on changes occurring from pre-to-post BSRF. Those four factors were:

- Whether or not the couples had a child or children in the home.
- Pre-BSRF relationship satisfaction: above or below the average for the couples taking BSRF.
- Military rank: sergeant and above or specialist and below.
- Ethnic background, testing if couples where one or both partners were a minority showed different effects from the entire sample.

There were no key differential effects of taking BSRF for those who either did or did not have a child in the home. The absence of differential effects held for both relationship quality outcomes as well as Army quality of life ratings.

Couples above and couples below average on relationship satisfaction prior to BSRF showed statistically significant gains in relationship quality. However, couples who were initially less satisfied than average showed greater gains from pre to post-BSRF (and out to follow-up) than those who were higher than average in initial satisfaction levels. These data parallel other research on PREP suggesting that those at greater risk may derive greater benefits.²⁰

Differences in rank were unrelated to outcomes. Both groups reported similar gains.

Couples where one or both partners were from an ethnic minority demonstrated virtually identical gains from taking BSRF as compared to other couples in sample. Larger samples in future analyses will allow for such possible differences to be tested in a greater variety of ways (e.g., looking at same race couples vs. mixed race, etc.).

IV. FEEDBACK FROM PROVIDERS

In addition to the data from program participants, providers of BSRF filled out a questionnaire asking about their experiences in conducting BSRF as well as their perceptions of couples' experience of it.

When conducting BSRF, chaplains and their staffs team up with Health Promotion personnel. While we solicited feedback from both groups, most of the data we received and have analyzed came from chaplains. Responses from 29 providers were received. Of these, 22 were from chaplains or chaplain staff, 5 were from community health nurse staff, and 2 were from other staff personnel. Some of the findings here are presented for all providers who contributed feedback and some are limited only to the chaplains' feedback as noted by the terms used here—"providers" vs. "chaplains."

This report focuses on aspects of provider feedback that are most important for both policy makers as well as the implementation of BSRF.

Summary of findings based on responses of BSRF providers:

- Providers believe that BSRF positively impacts couples in their attitudes and beliefs about the Army, but such effects appear to be seen as less potent than the direct effects on the quality of couple functioning. An exception to this is morale, with providers believing that BSRF has a strong impact on Army couple and individual morale.
- Providers believe that their own superiors are very supportive of BSRF. However, they see other commanders as being considerably less supportive of BSRF.
- Providers strongly believe that BSRF should continue.
- Chaplains, in particular, believe that the experience of BSRF enhances their own training for fulfilling their mission in the Army.

Ratings of Various Potential Impacts and Benefits

Providers were asked about the potential impacts on a variety of dimensions, such as:

- Personal and Army morale
- Unit cohesion
- Awareness of other resources
- Retention likelihood
- Sense of belonging in the Army.

Overall, providers did not perceive impacts on any of these dimensions to be any more likely than impacts on the others. The average rating on these types of Army specific items on the seven point scale was 5.4. So, the average rating depicted agreement, but not strongest possible agreement with such items.

Using this same format, providers were also asked about such things as command support and enhancement of their own training. The following sections describe findings on individual items where the level of agreement was particularly high or particularly low or otherwise noteworthy.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

BSRF fosters retention among Army families.

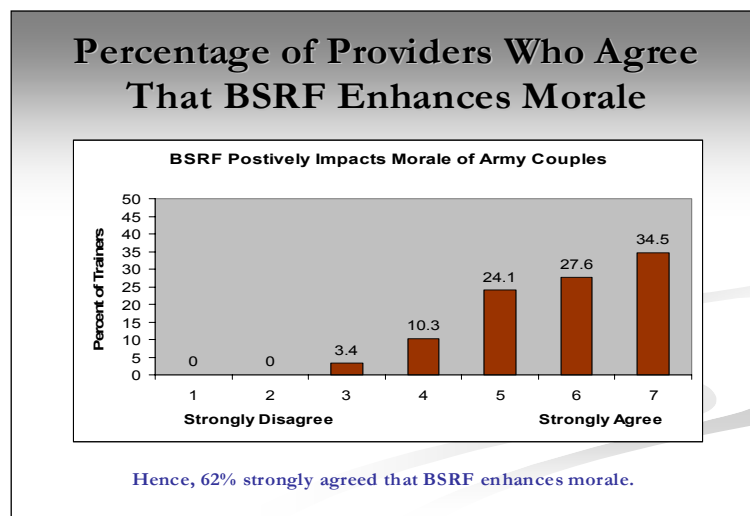
BSRF has made families more aware of wellness resources and services available to them.

BSRF has positively impacted unit cohesion.

These and various other statements were rated on a seven point scale, with 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Enhancement of Morale

Providers were asked about their perception of the effects of BSRF on the morale of active duty Army personnel. Sixty-two percent of BSRF providers strongly agreed (i.e., rating 6 or a 7 on the 7 point scale) with the statement that BSRF enhances morale. See Figure 21.



"We talked with couples and other professionals (CHNs) about some who wanted/needed follow-up care. Some couples have gotten further assistance from professionals after BSRF."

—a chaplain in Schweinfurt, Germany

Figure 21. Providers Perception that BSRF Enhances Morale

Whether taking the ratings of only Army chaplains or of all the providers surveyed, this statement was among those most strongly agreed to by the providers. In other words, among many possible effects of BSRF on Army related variables, providers strongly believe BSRF enhances morale.

Provider Perception of Command Support

BSRF is conceptualized as a commander's program. A key question asked of the providers was whether or not they perceive commanders as supportive of BSRF. Providers rated three statements about command support for level of agreement with the sentiment expressed:

- *I think that commanders at my installation are really behind the BSRF program.*
- *The unit commander(s) at my location are supportive of BSRF.*
- *My immediate supervisor is supportive of BSRF.*

As can be seen in Figure 22, providers of BSRF agreed with the notion that commanders were supportive of BSRF. However, by comparing responses to this question to that of the previous two, it can be seen that providers were less uniformly agreeing that commanders were supportive of BSRF than that it enhances morale—41% strongly agreeing (rated a 6 or 7) with the statement that installation commanders support BSRF.

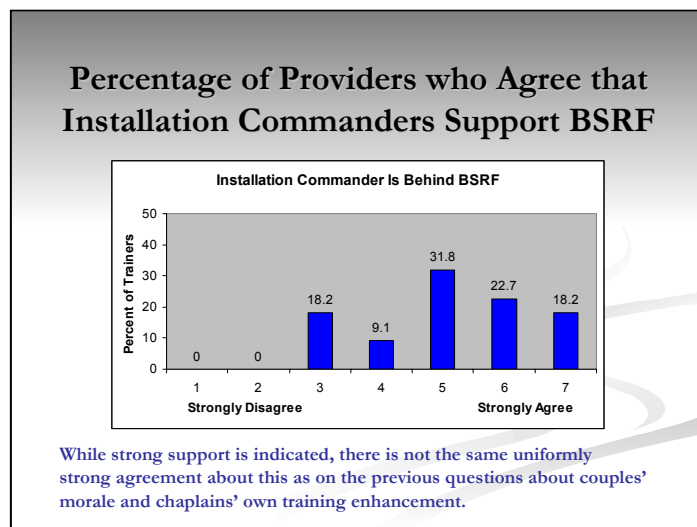


Figure 22. Percentage of Providers Agreeing that Commanders Supported BSRF

The command support data depicted in Figure 22 are based on all statements listed above. As such, an important finding is obscured. Among the various statements of this format that providers rated for overall agreement, the first two of the three above were among those with which they were *least* likely to agree, while the latter of the three above was among those with which they were *most* likely to agree.

In other words, providers see a significant divide between the supportiveness of their immediate commanders vs. the supportiveness of commanders in general for BSRF. Clearly, providers have concern about lower levels of command support outside of their own teams and service related units. This could be partially affected by the nature of installation versus unit command

Chaplains respond about command support:

"If the BDE or DIV commander says it will happen, it will be a success."

—Ft. Drum

"I found the NCO chain to be supportive of and anxious to have something for young soldiers. Couples see commanders making an effort to do something positive for them."

—Ft. Wainwright

"Leaders at Company level need to push BSRF for it to be a success."

—Schweinfurt, Germany

relationships, especially as it applies to the OPTEMPO issues associated with tactical units versus installations.

Should BSRF Continue?

Among the items receiving very strong agreement among providers was this one: *The Army should continue the BSRF program.* Figure 23 displays the level of agreement with this statement. This suggests very strong support for BSRF among those that are called to provide it.

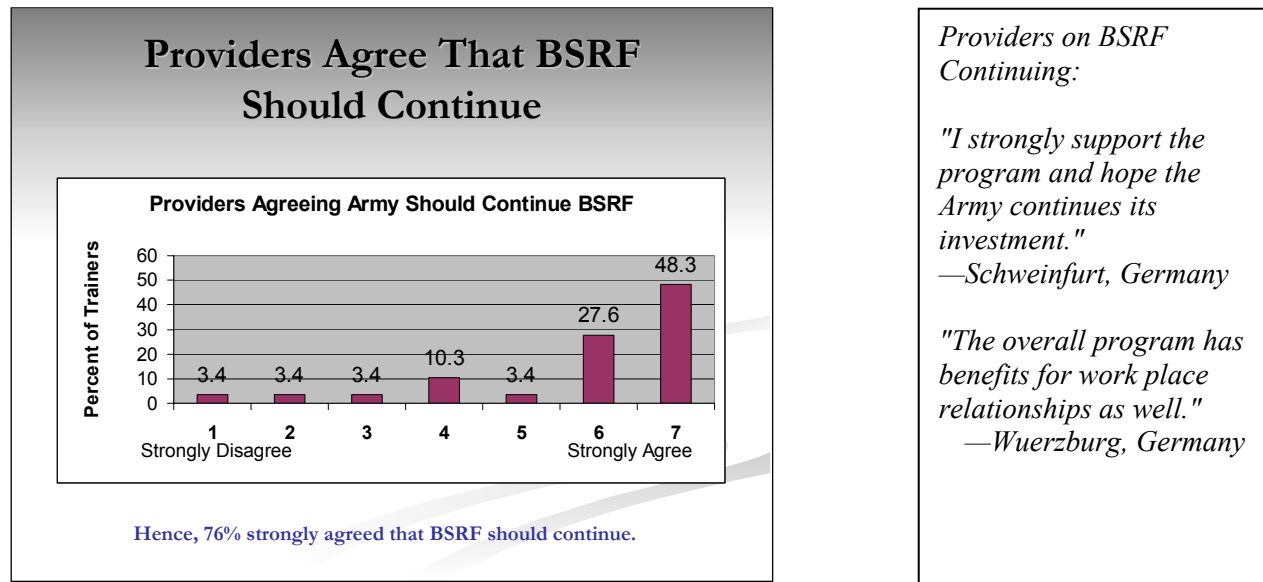


Figure 23. Providers Support BSRF Continuing

Enhancement of Chaplains' Training

One important aspect of BSRF is that it has the potential to enhance the training of those who provide services to others because of the quality of the training they receive before they conduct BSRF. For example, the core training in PREP is a three day experience that teaches those who will be providing BSRF about the latest research on marriage and strategies for teaching couples better communication, conflict management, and ways to engage attendees on subjects such as expectations, commitment, and forgiveness. Such training is believed to be useful both for conducting PREP itself such as in the context of BSRF, but also for use in counseling and other work with individuals, couples, and families.²¹

When asked, chaplains strongly endorsed a statement that BSRF enhanced their own training (Figure 24). A full 68% of chaplains strongly agree that BSRF enhanced their own training—and thereby, readiness for their mission.

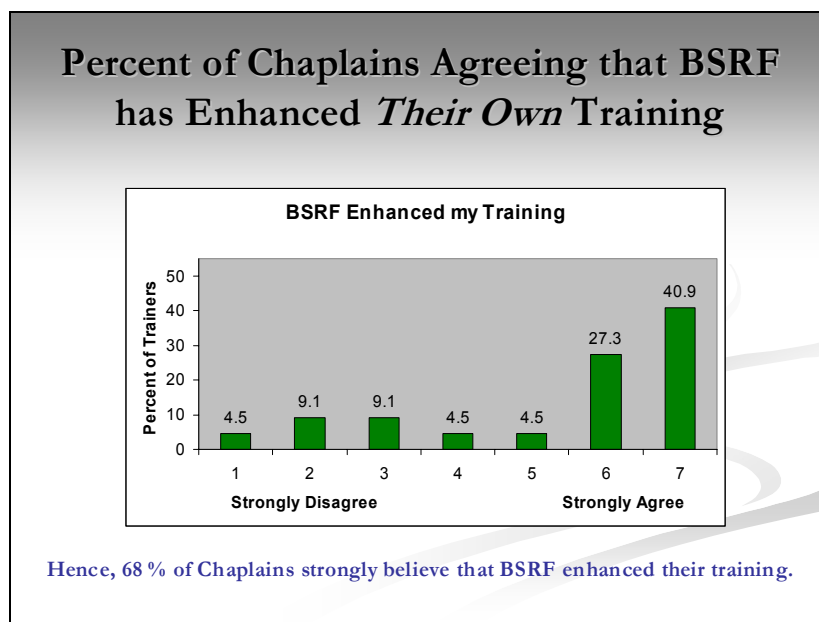


Figure 24. Percent of Chaplains Saying BSRF Enhanced Their Training

Providers were not asked about couple relationship quality impacts in the same format as the Army specific items presented in this section. Hence, comparisons of level of agreement on impacts at couple functioning vs. Army life variables are not possible with these items. However, in the next section, data are presented showing what elements of BSRF providers considered to be most useful to the couples who attended it using an open ended format.

Providers Views of What is Most Useful to Army Couples

Providers were asked to name the three aspects of BSRF that they found most helpful to couples. They had wide latitude to write whatever they wished, since it was not a forced-choice response question. Figure 25 shows the number of providers who made comments in various categories as coded by our evaluation team.

As can be seen, the communication training elements of BSRF were mentioned most often, with the next most frequently mentioned benefits being the opportunity to get away overnight and the Health Promotion content. It is noteworthy that so many providers spontaneously wrote in the overnight aspect of BSRF as being helpful for couples. As will be discussed in the implications, this strongly suggests this key element of the program's design be continued it at all possible.

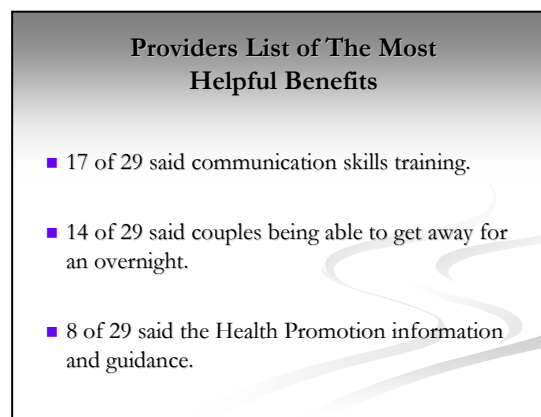


Figure 25. What Providers Say Is Most Helpful

V. OBSTACLES TO BSRF: COUPLE AND PROVIDER PERSPECTIVES

Both couples and providers were asked about the obstacles to conducting, or attending, BSRF.

Summary of feedback on obstacles:

- Both couples and providers report that the need to secure child-care presents a strong obstacle to couples participating in BSRF.
- Many couples said that not knowing about BSRF until close to the starting point made it harder to participate. Providers echoed this concern, though did not rate it as highly.
- Providers reported that deployments significantly interfered with their ability to get couples to BSRF.
- Forty-one (41%) of providers but only 10% of couples listed a lack of command support as making couple attendance difficult.
- Providers listed “accessing funds” as their own, greatest hurdle to conducting BSRF.
- In addition to other points made above, providers also frequently mentioned the difficulty of clearing enough time in their own routines to conduct BSRF.

Obstacles Mentioned Most Often By Couples

Figure 26 displays the percentage of participants reporting various obstacles to attending BSRF. As can be seen, not knowing until the last minute was the most frequently mentioned obstacle. It seems likely that insufficient notice of BSRF happening would also have made childcare arrangements—the second most commonly mentioned obstacle—even more difficult. We would expect childcare arrangements to be a common and quite difficult obstacle for couples with children to attend BSRF.

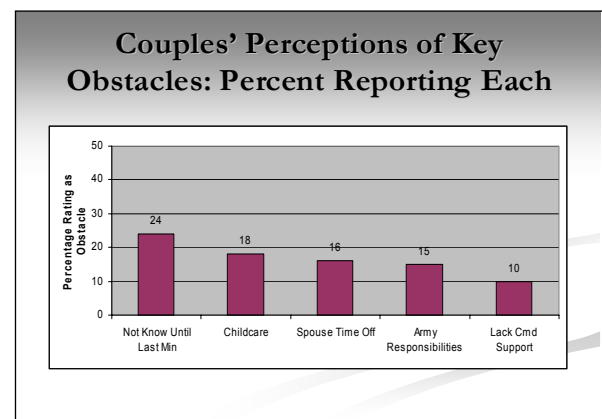


Figure 26. Couple Obstacles as Rated by Participants

Provider Perceptions of Couple Obstacles

Providers gave similar ratings of the obstacles that couples faced in coming to BSRF, though they added deployments, which were not prominently mentioned by Army couples unless “Army responsibilities” encompassed that in their minds. Figure 27 shows the most commonly rated obstacles for couples in the judgment of providers.

Providers may have been more likely to rate obstacles higher than couples because providers are making their ratings based on many couples who did not attend as well as those who did. In contrast, couple ratings of obstacles are based only on couples that were able to attend. For instance, a provider can report that a couple could not attend because the active duty partner was deployed when such a couple would not have been available to give such ratings in the evaluations. Hence, the provider ratings as given here may be more useful in planning how to reduce obstacles. Helping couples solve childcare problems and giving couples increased time for planning for an upcoming BSRF would reduce substantial obstacles for couples.

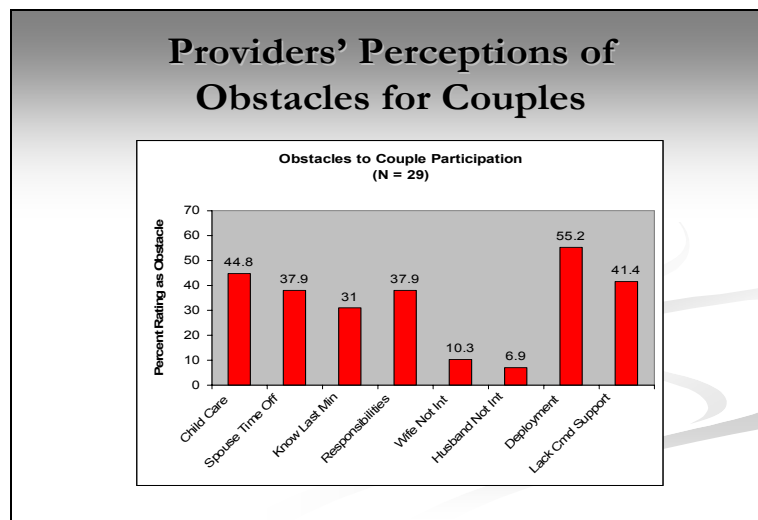


Figure 27. Couple Obstacles: Provider Rated

Provider Perception of Their Own Obstacles

Providers have obstacles to putting on BSRF that are additional to those that couples face. Figure 28 displays their ratings of the greatest obstacles to putting on BSRF. As can be seen, funding is the number one obstacle for providers conducting BSRF, followed by the difficulties of childcare, deployments, and freeing up their own time to conduct BSRF.

As cited in the introductory section of this report, contradictory guidance from the Joint Travel Regulatory Board and The Judge Advocate General resulted in the complete suspension of appropriated funding for BSRF iterations. Some local commanders funded the program locally in 2002 using non-appropriated funds, but for the most part the program was suspended in the majority of pilot locations. As a result of the suspension, the challenge of obtaining funding was borne largely by the providers supporting those commanders who continued to execute the program.

With anticipated funding utilization guidance changes for the future, this may become less of an issue. It demonstrates, however, the continued challenges to implementing programs that truly seek to incorporate Army spouses into any form of training when the use of appropriated funds are involved.

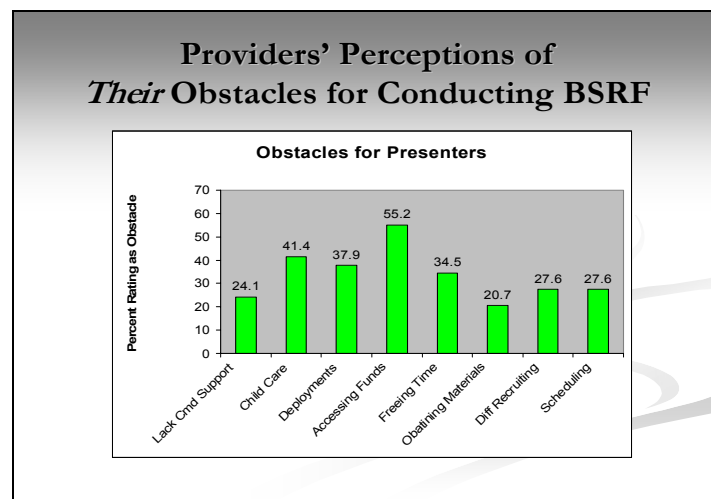


Figure 28. Provider Ratings of Provider Obstacles

Providers: What would make BSRF easier to implement?

"Very difficult to provide childcare."

—Schweinfurt, Germany

"Command support at the highest level."

—Ft. Drum

"Fully funded Appropriated Funds and Non-Appropriated funds, in advance of planning."

—Schweinfurt, Germany

"Funding!"

—Schofield Barracks

"Clear guidance on funding usage."

—Ft. Richardson

VI. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

These data present an encouraging picture of the ability of the Army to strengthen Army marriages and families through the BSRF program. Ongoing research, as well as more in depth research, will provide an increasingly detailed picture, over time, of the effects of BSRF. We close this report with a discussion of the implications and future directions of this work.

The Army Operational Environment – Today and Tomorrow

Within the current operational environment, strong families are paramount for continued prosecution of the global war on terrorism. The sustained nature of this conflict will place strains on soldiers and spouses alike, regardless of rank, specialty, or component. The combination of marital discord, high personnel tempo, lack of early identification of marital problems, and inconsistent family readiness group implementation were recently cited as contributing factors to a series of tragic events within the Army. While no single program is a panacea for family issues, integrated programs such as BSRF should be further explored within the context of better business practices to provide the full spectrum of support to soldiers and families. As the Army grapples with the disposition of non-core competencies, particular attention must be paid to effective and efficient delivery of services and their contribution to readiness.

The evolution of Army doctrine (FM 1, FM 3, FM 7-0) depicts the operational environment facing the Army as it sustains its transformation efforts into the future. Against this operational backdrop, the foundation is being laid for the type of soldiers needed to succeed in this demanding environment. As this requirement continues to be shaped, a critical component of operational success will be found in the resilience, agility, and adaptability of soldiers. These characteristics will be manifest not only in the systems designed to train and develop soldiers, but also in the confidence of these same soldiers in the resilience and stability of their families. Strong families serve as the foundation for ready families, who enhance the readiness of units. Programs and initiatives designed only react to family issues and crises breed dependency and weakness and largely represent the “legacy force” approach to family readiness. BSRF provides insight into a new vision of family readiness, building on a foundation of marital strength and competence and a prevention oriented process for helping families help themselves. BSRF alone is not the totality of this vision, but it represents a leap forward in addressing the needs of members of the Army in a holistic, integrated manner.

Strong Families: Gains in Relationship Quality for Army Couples

A key part of the rationale behind BSRF is the premise that the quality of the marriages and family lives of soldiers ultimately affect their ability to meet the demands of their missions in the Army. Further, there are many potential stresses inherent in the lives of soldiers, and those stresses can cause negative impacts at home that in turn can degrade readiness. With such a high percentage of married junior enlisted soldiers, the Army recognizes that these young couples are the building block of the Army (the centerpiece of Army formations), and represent the leaders

of the Objective Force. A positive training experience such as BSRF may be a key component in enhancing the functioning of newly forming marriage relationships.

The data collected so far suggest that couples in the Army who take BSRF derive a number of specific benefits that many studies show are associated with healthy marriages.²² In terms of marital and relationship quality, these Army couples demonstrated gains on many research validated dimensions. They reported strong gains in overall confidence in the future of their relationships. In an era where many doubt the ability of couples to make marriages work, long-term, such gains are noteworthy. This is especially so given the unique stressors associated with military life. For military couples, we believe that confidence is a particularly critical factor during deployments. A confident view of the health and future of the relationship can motivate the deployed soldier to maintain focus on, and endure the demands of, the mission in order to return to their loved ones with whom they see their future. If gains in confidence (based in part on competence) could be maintained for long periods of time, such effects might extend to the prevention of negative outcomes such as suicides that are linked to relationship events or dynamics. Since 1999, 75% of all completed suicides in the Army involved the loss or dissolution of a significant relationship. Future research may be able to assess for the possibility of such preventive effects.

While there were only weak gains in overall relationship satisfaction, even such modest gains in satisfaction are rarely seen in other studies on PREP (the relationship building component of BSRF).

Following BSRF, couples reported reductions in various patterns of negative interaction, with these gains being maintained and likely increasing by the one month follow-up. Pilot research by COL Joann Hollandsworth and Dr. Victoria Niederhauser (Health Promotion leaders) at Scofield Barracks in Hawaii showed similar results using different measures, with gains being maintained 6 months following training.²³ The tendencies to escalate when conflicts arise (with shouting and hostility), to invalidate one's partner (with name calling and put-downs), to withdraw from talking (and stonewall one's partner), and to make negative rather than the more positive interpretations of why one's partner does what he or she does, are dynamics that are associated with marital distress and divorce, poor mental health, increased risk for poor physical health, and a host of negative child outcomes.²⁴ Specifically, such dynamics are strongly associated with propensity towards divorce, and they are also associated with increased risk for incidents of domestic violence. In these short-term findings, couples also reported improvements in their own abilities to stop negative patterns when they arise—a key goal of the relationship building aspects of BSRF.

For both withdrawal and the communication skill of letting one's partner know what one heard, the gains at follow-up were stronger than those from pre to post-BSRF.²⁵ This suggests that some effects are less immediate, but take at least some time to work their way into the fabric of the relationships. Future research with Army couples should incorporate longer follow-ups to better assess which effects build over time and which erode. That would be useful information in the development of strategies to reinforce and augment positive changes over time.

We believe that couples who do best in life are those who fundamentally are able to build and maintain two kinds of safety at home: (1) safety in a clear sense of the future, based on commitment and confidence, and (2) safety in the day-to-day interaction and connection of the partners.²⁶ The evidence here—for reductions in negative interaction, increases in perceived ability to stop escalating conflicts, and increased confidence in the ability to handle life well together—are encouraging evidence that BSRF can help couples gain in the kinds of safety that lead to long-term, healthy marriages. Being safe at home should be a prime goal of BSRF, and a program of ongoing research might enable it to be optimized for such ends.

Overall, these findings represent solid evidence of positive impacts.²⁷

Ready Families: Gains in Army Family Life

Importantly, couples reported gains in three important dimensions related to being an Army couple. Following completion of BSRF, (1) they reported increases in feeling like they could handle Army life well, (2) they reported increases in the ability to talk constructively about Army issues, and (3) they reported increases in the belief that the Army cares for Army families. Such positive gains may be particularly important for first term soldiers and their mates, given the wide range of changes and new routines that they must accommodate to have a successful tour (and perhaps career) in the Army. Likewise, being able to discern some care and concern within the Army for Army families may be especially important for soldiers in their first tour of duty. Given their relatively young ages and dislocation from families of origin, seeing tangible evidence of their commander's concerns for their lives might be particularly motivating.

The increases in confidence for talking about Army issues and the perception that the Army is concerned for Army families were most notable at the third time point, which was the 30 day follow-up. There may be two (or more) reasons why this is the case. First, as noted above, some of these effects may unfold over time, and be otherwise less apparent with only assessment just following taking the program. Second, it is possible that the follow-up event itself may have done something constructive to demonstrate to the couples that the Army is concerned for Army families. As noted earlier, follow-up data were collected at a type of re-union event. Simply scheduling and holding this event—designed to connect providers again with the couples and symbolize their accomplishment of completing BSRF—may enhance their belief that the Army really does care how they are doing at home. For this reason, we strongly recommend that this “event” be built into the structure of BSRF regardless of any needs for data collection.

Mission Readiness, Morale, and Retention: Long-Term and Short Term Perspectives

Overall, it appears that the short-term effects of BSRF on Army couples are clearest in terms of their overall relationship quality and their specific sense of being able to cope well, as a couple, with Army life. Short-term gains on dimensions of general Army morale and perceived readiness were not found, though mixed evidence of some impact on retention sentiments was found. A larger sample size through all assessment points might have allowed for more statistical power to detect some changes on these dimensions.

Overall, the clearest effects were on dimensions most proximal to the content of BSRF (the ability of the couple to function well as a couple) and least clear effects were on more distal goals related to Army duty and functioning. This trend was clear in a number of ways, including on the impact rating comparisons, where couples were more likely to report relationship impacts than Army specific impacts.

The lack of changes (or strong changes) on the dimensions most specific to Army mission functioning in this short-term program evaluation was not surprising. After all, those are outcomes that would most plausibly come about over time as a function of improved relationship functioning. For example, previous research with Navy couples has shown that spouses are more likely to encourage their mate to leave the service as the tension between work demands and home increase.²⁸ By improving couples ability to talk about Army concerns and by reducing work to home spillover, BSRF may exert an indirect impact on future re-enlistment intentions. It is also possible that BSRF simply has few effects on such variables. This is a question for future research—especially research that can include two crucial elements: (1) longer-term follow-ups and (2) access to “hard indicators” of such things as readiness evaluations, early return of dependent histories, re-enlistment, job performance ratings, and domestic violence reports. Clearly, obtaining data would be very challenging, but it is conceivable that the necessary precautions and permissions could be put in place to assess such important outcomes that are believed to be affected by the functioning of Army couples as couples. At present, there is at least informal empirical evidence from installations such as Ft. Richardson in Alaska of BSRF and PREP lowering the rates of domestic violence incidents for the group of 400 couples that have completed BSRF or PREP there.²⁹

Of note is the inconsistent conduct of Army Family Team Building sessions as a part of BSRF. Elements of AFTB link to mission readiness through enhancing the self reliance of soldiers and families through an increased understanding of the type of programs and opportunities that are available within the Army. Future research should capture the impact of AFTB and perceptions of mission readiness and intent to become involved in family readiness groups and other community activities.

From the data here, we know that those who did say they were more likely to re-enlist following BSRF were those who made the greatest gains on variables such as feeling positively about being an Army family and feeling like the Army cares for and supports Army families. Based on this, to affect the likelihood of re-enlistment of Army couples based on Army family issues, one would want to (a) strengthen the confidence Army couples have in their ability to handle life in the Army (through programs such as BSRF), and (b) provide tangible and clear evidence of respect and concern for Army families among Army commanders.

"Building relationships with all ranks, unit leaders and family members was extremely rewarding. Couples and unit leaders know their Unit Ministry Team members better now and have more faith in what they can accomplish for command."

—a chaplain in Giebelstadt, Germany

"BSRF provided CHNs the chance to develop a rapport with community members, both participants and other professionals. It enhanced our reputation as people who care for our clients and the community."

—a chaplain in Wuerzburg, Germany

In contrast to a lack of evidence that BSRF reduced the effects of problems at home on work productivity, there was evidence that BSRF reduced spillover of work stress into the home. These findings were statistically significant for males, and might be for females as well with a larger sample. These effects suggest that couples perceive themselves to be, on average, doing better at keeping the stressors of Army work from impinging on quality of life at home. As elsewhere, these are effects that can be investigated more fully in future research. It would be especially interesting to see if there were long-term reductions of Army-to-home spillover, and if such effects over time made it more likely that active duty members of Army couples would be more likely to re-enlist.

Reducing work stress spillover into the home can not only improve marital relationships among Army families, but can improve local community relations through reduced community domestic dispute incidents. With the current trend to accelerate the privatization of family housing, the Army will be less able to monitor and address Army couple domestic disputes as it has in the past, placing a potential drain on local community services. A “community based” Army represents an opportunity for the Army to positively impact surrounding communities, as well as a challenge to avoid negatively impacting on these communities.

Various Kinds of Couples Benefited from BSRF

It is very important to note that the positive effects were, if anything, strongest for the couples who came into BSRF relatively less happy in their relationships than other couples who participated. These findings are suggestive of something seen elsewhere in related research—that couples at higher risk may generally derive the greatest benefits from such programming.³⁰ Happier couples derived benefits, but less happy couples derived the greatest benefits. Gains were also seen regardless of whether or not a couple had a child in the home, and regardless of rank. The latter could not be fully tested with these data since the greatest number of couples had active duty members of relatively lower ranks. It also bears noting that the positive findings here are with a sample that is, relative to the national average, younger and of lower income, suggesting that the ability to benefit from such educational experiences extends to couples with less means and resources—at least where there is a strong basis of commitment in the relationships.³¹ Furthermore, effects of the program were similar for couples where one or both partners were of a minority group—as compared to the rest of the sample. Minority participants were also just as likely, and in some ways more likely, to give BSRF high marks in terms of their satisfaction with the program. Larger sample sizes in future evaluations should allow for a more thorough analysis of how race and ethnicity affect both the outcomes from taking BSRF and satisfaction with the program.

Couples Like BSRF

Couples reported high levels of satisfaction with the overall BSRF experience. They very strongly endorsed the sentiment that they would recommend BSRF to a friend. Further, providers did not report a lack of interest among the obstacles to getting couples into and through BSRF. Indeed, there is mounting evidence that couples—especially young couples—are quite open to such experiences.³²

As far as components go, couples gave high marks to all the three major components, though there was some evidence in both the couple ratings as well as the provider feedback of greater satisfaction with the relationship building aspects of BSRF. This may be because those elements are most directly in tune with the couples “felt” needs, but it also may be because those elements are based on a program with a long history of research, development, and refinement. In the case of BSRF, the spiritual encouragement is likely the component with the most variability in its actual implementation (based on available chaplains’ preferences). This allows individual chaplains to tune the experience toward the needs and desires of the couples at hand, but it also may be wise for the chaplain corps to develop some resources and modules specifically for use by chaplains providing BSRF.

The Role Chaplains Play

Army couples strongly perceive that chaplains are the most supportive of Army families among various types of officers. The data provide evidence for the very important role Army chaplains play in showing care and tangible support to Army families. No other agency in the Army has the same level of trust as chaplains. Consistent with the findings presented here, data from the Sample Survey of Military Personnel (SSMP) show that soldiers rank chaplains third, only behind a friend or close relative, among the “most likely people for Army personnel to turn to for advice about confidential personal or family problems.”³³ Also, programs such as BSRF will not only provide substantive information, informed by research, but provide an introduction of first term soldier couples to the unit chaplain. Chaplain Curt Schlosser at Ft. Richardson summed up this specific benefit of BSRF in this manner:

“A great spin-off [of BSRF] is the rapport and relationship that is established between participants and presenters. After those weekends the professionals from ACS/FAP and the chaplains are no longer feared strangers, they are now viewed as caring helpers who are approachable and friendly and not trying to report them or take their kids away.”

Hence, Chaplains not only see BSRF as enhancing their training, but enhancing their mission effectiveness, as well. It is important to note that these officers—who couples perceive as being supportive and caring their needs—strongly endorsed the idea that BSRF should continue. They have an important and perhaps unique perspective on the needs of Army couples, and they see BSRF as helping them fulfill their mission to Army families.

Command Support for BSRF

As part of the feedback that providers gave, it was noteworthy that they perceived high levels of command support for BSRF from their immediate superiors (e.g., command chaplains). Yet, they gave relatively low marks to commanders in general when asked about their support for BSRF. Taken with the couple data, such findings demonstrate that both couples and chaplains perceive lower levels of support for Army families—or for a program designed to support them—from those in command. It is important to note that there is a significant viewpoint issue associated with command support. From the viewpoint of the participants, their most relevant perspective is the unit commander (company/troop/battery). Command support for these individuals closely

relates to other obstacles, many of which are unit driven. Timely notification, spouse time off, and Army responsibilities normally fall within the domain of the unit commander – normally a Captain with 4-8 years of experience. Command support for providers normally ties in to more senior level commanders, particularly those within an installation support setting, where resourcing, competing support requirements, and time, are critical areas of concern and management.

One of the most innovative aspects of BSRF is the way it is conceptualized as a commander's program—as a way for commanders to show support and tangible aid to the functioning of Army families. These data suggest the following:

- (1) That support among commanders for BSRF would likely benefit from stronger, Army-wide promotion of such services, as well as command support from the highest levels.
- (2) Education of commanders about the role of BSRF in demonstrating their support for Army couples; and aid in helping chaplains educate commanders about BSRF.
- (3) More emphasis within BSRF program content itself about BSRF being a tangible evidence of Army commander support for Army couples.

Commanders at all levels are bombarded with numerous competing demands and, ultimately, filter all of these demands through the filter of near term mission execution and readiness. BSRF must ultimately be seen by commanders as an enhancer of readiness, rather than a drain on readiness (losing a soldier for X training hours). As such, it is reasonable to expect that both the reality and perception of command support would increase by ensuring that BSRF is integrated into the routines of specific units, most notably as a scheduled, resourced training event that is embedded on training calendar at all echelons. For most of the brigades participating in this research, data were collected from early iterations of the training within various commands and units.

Obstacles to BSRF

The data given by both couples and providers about obstacles to BSRF provide important feedback upon which to base future efforts. Some obstacles might be lessened and some, like deployments, are necessarily matters beyond the control of providers of BSRF. Likewise, providers of BSRF have no control over—and little influence of—the work and other schedules of the non-active duty members of Army couples. Yet, it may be that guidelines could be developed that would help providers communicate with non-Army employers ways in which they might support the Army mission with some accommodation to the schedules of non-Army persons—including noting to such employers potential linkages between couple functioning and work productivity. This would require community outreach efforts to reach employers. Yet, in this post 9-11 environment, such support of the community for the needs of Army couples is not inconceivable.

A highly rated obstacle that is very amenable to change is short-notice for the occurrence of BSRF programs. While couples may not benefit from large lag times, they clearly need enough to both re-order their own personal schedules and to work with those of employers and baby-sitters. This issue is not unique to BSRF, as predictability has remained a consistent issue through the various survey instruments across the Army for the past few years. This is most evident in the Army Training and Leader Development Panel results. On posts with large and active chapel programs, chaplains might be able to work with the religious community to help in providing childcare for couples wishing to attend BSRF.

Two other specific inputs from providers stood out here. One, they strongly believe in the value to Army couples of having a night away from children and responsibilities. The specific value of such “over-nights” for Army couples should be closely considered as policy makers and commanders consider how best to implement BSRF. Providers also reported that funding was a problem for them in conducting BSRF. This may be a specific result of problems in funding that occurred during the course of this evaluation. Regardless, BSRF will be most effective when providers are able to conduct it without significant difficulties in accessing funding for things needed to bring this about, including materials, food, lodging on the over-night, etc.

Limitations of this Evaluation and Opportunities of Evaluations Planned

As with most all such studies, this program evaluation has specific limitations. First, the measures are limited to self-report. Other studies with clear and strong results in the relationships education field, for instance, also use measures of couple interaction based on outside observers ratings.³⁴ Second, the follow-up assessment period is short, extending only to one month post BSRF. Some of the desired effects of BSRF—such as couple stability or retention—are long-term goals, and not likely to be measured in shorter term evaluations. Third, this study did not employ a control group. Couples are compared to their own pre-BSRF functioning and beliefs.

Future research is planned that addresses each of these. A design employing random assignment to a comparison group, longer term follow-ups, and “hard” indicators of couple and soldier functioning that are external to self-reported ratings (e.g., retention data, domestic violence incidents) is planned. The gains demonstrated here may be even more evident when couples taking BSRF are contrasted with those not taking it, and the longer-term impacts on Army functioning, readiness, and retention can be better assessed. The initial results are promising with regard to the original aims of the BSRF model.

A Basis for Moving Forward

The Army’s BSRF program is an example of applying strategic thought increase soldier and spouse relationship competence and confidence by focusing on tangible outcomes derived by employing best practices in both relationship enhancement and health promotion. While there is, no doubt, room for refinement, the model is innovative for the attempt to combine the elements of individually successful programs in a military context:

- (1) It focuses on command support, the reduction of barriers to participation, rewards for participation, and a combination of state-of-the-art elements.

- (2) What may be most unique about the Army's efforts here is that an innovative model developed initially at the unit level has received considerable attention, leadership, and support from senior leaders.
- (3) The factors above led to both a program of evaluation of the effectiveness of BSRF as well as the prospect of impacting soldiers and their families in many brigades over time.

In total, the overall BSRF effort provides a strong example of an institution attempting to accomplish broad-based prevention efforts with ongoing refinement based on empirical information. Providers and couples believe that something very worthwhile is taking place with BSRF. If positive effects continue to be seen over time, this program in the Army may provide impetus for various other institutions to make greater attempts to help couples build strong and healthy marriages and families, thereby affirming its role as an institution that seeks to balance its demands with the needs of its members. Ultimately, programs such as BSRF lay the foundation for two future generations of Army leaders, providing more stable, productive leaders who are able to set an example of marital stability for future soldiers and spouses.

This interim report demonstrates the value of BSRF, especially the PREP component. The holistic integration of a number of "stovepipe" programs into a command sponsored training event represents a viewpoint that transcends the traditional center-centric, installation based approach to delivering services to soldiers and families. As BSRF deployment is considered beyond the pilot program stage, there are several key elements that must be addressed. These include reserve component deployment (USAR and ARNG), increased training density to increase the number of participants, and better integration of program elements from AFTB level 1 and 2. Ultimately, commanders must make the link between unit readiness, soldier readiness, family readiness, and marital stability. As this linkage becomes more evident within the unit setting, BSRF demonstrates the potential to be the first adopted "interim force well-being program", setting the stage for reengineering well-being functional programs for the objective force.

Endnotes

¹ The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP®) is a research-based approach to teaching couples (premarital or marital) how to communicate effectively, work as a team to solve problems, manage conflicts without damaging closeness, and preserve and enhance commitment and friendship. The PREP Approach is based on over 20 years of research in the field of marital health and success, with much of the specific research conducted at the University of Denver and funded by the National Institute of Mental Health. PREP is empirically informed, meaning that, to the extent possible, the strategies of PREP are based on basic research on marital and family health. PREP is also empirically tested. PREP has been studied intensively, including long-term outcome studies by six different research teams in four different countries. Further, the program is continually refined based on the latest research.

² In all figures, the data presented were provided by the exact same set of couples at all time points in that figure. In other words, the post scores are not based on a different sample than the follow-up scores in the figures where there are three time points. The statistical procedures require that this be so which means that the averages across time in every figure are directly comparable.

³ Not all respondents answered all questions; hence, the percent that is missing to otherwise add to 100% in data such as this is due to respondents leaving those questions blank. Despite being assured that specific data from any respondent would not be provided to the Army at that level of response, some respondents likely enhanced their own sense of confidentiality by leaving some questions that might make them more identifiable blank. Given the nature of the analyses presented here, a respondent who has missing data on any variable involved in a given analyses will drop out of those analyses because of the missing data on a variable used in the analysis.

⁴ For all of the analyses that look at averages for couples taking BSRF from pre to post-BSRF (or to follow-up), the same type of statistical approach was used. Consistent with various studies in this field, we tested for differences in the average ratings on various dimension over time. In statistical terminology, we utilized analysis of variance with both time (pre, post, and follow-up) and gender (male or female) as repeated measures, with couple as the unit of analysis. This model of analysis allows us to test for changes over time as well as differences between men and women, and further, allows for tests of whether or not changes over time vary by gender. Those wanting more information regarding the nature of those analyses or specific results should contact the first author of the report.

⁵ An effect size is a representation of how much change or difference exists between the averages of two groups being compared or one group's scores being compared over time, translated into standard deviation units. This practice has become increasingly accepted in the social sciences because it allows others to rapidly communicate to another whether or not a statistically significant difference is large or small or moderate. It also allows one to better understand which changes over time, such as those presented here, are larger and which are smaller. For instance, couples taking BSRF, on average, reported statistically significant, greater levels of happiness following the program. They also reported statistically significant, greater levels of confidence in the future of their relationships. However, the latter gain was far stronger than the former. One could say that both changed as a result of BSRF, but confidence changed more than happiness. Effect sizes of the type reported here are generally calculated by taking the difference means and dividing it by the standard deviation for that measure. For example, to get the effect size for changes in confidence pre to post-BSRF, the mean of the pre score is subtracted from the mean of the post score, and then that difference is divided by the standard deviation for the measure.

⁶ An example of this phenomenon is the way that 10 point scales are used in judging ice skating or gymnastics contests. A very small difference on the 10 point scale can mean the differences between 1st place and 30th because of how the judges use the scales. Since little of the total possible variance is actually used, a small difference can amount to a large difference in the phenomena being rated (the quality of skating performances). Effect size metrics allow for some control over this matter of how scaling affects the appearance of results.

⁷ These percents are approximate because of the presence of some non-responses by Army couples on some Army specific variables.

⁸ We used measures used in many other studies. The measures used were restricted to self-report, but are measures with strong evidence of both reliability and validity in other research. Copies of the actual measures, and references related to their use in other studies, are available upon request.

⁹ The various measures used were chosen based on either their use in other research on couple functioning or program outcomes. Additionally, other measures were developed to assess dimensions of particular interest in this program evaluation. Regarding Army life and Army family life, we drew upon the availability of various measures that have been used in other surveys and research conducted within the Army over the years. Measures used are available upon request.

¹⁰ For example: Gottman, J. M., & Notarius, C. I. (2000). Decade Review: Observing marital interaction. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 927-947. Markman, H.J., & Hahlweg, K. (1993). The prediction and prevention of marital distress: An international perspective. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 13, 29-43. Karney, B.R., & Bradbury, T.N. (1995). The longitudinal course of marital quality and stability: A review of theory, method, and research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 118, 3-34; Stanley, S.M., Markman, H.J., & Whitton, S. (In Press). Communication, Conflict, and Commitment: Insights on the Foundations of Relationship Success from a National Survey. *Family Process*.

¹¹ Findings can be statistically significant—meaning very unlikely to be due to chance—but still be small in magnitude. Short-term changes in relationship satisfaction are often not seen at all in studies on PREP.

¹² Markman, H.J., Stanley, S.M., & Blumberg, S.L. (2001) *Fighting for Your Marriage: New and Revised Version*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc. Stanley, S., Trathen, D., McCain, S., & Bryan, M. (1998). *A Lasting Promise*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, Inc.

¹³ The ratings from the first time point where the largest number of couples contributed data are presented.

¹⁴ See Schumm, W. R., Silliman, B., & Bell, D. B. (2000). Perceived premarital counseling outcomes among recently married Army personnel. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 26, 177-186.

¹⁵ This type of analysis is identical in form to that described in note 19.

¹⁶ See Castro, C. W. & Huffman, A. H. (2001) Predicting Retention Rates of U.S. Soldiers Stationed in Europe. United States Army Medical Research Unit-Europe, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

¹⁷ See Castro, C. W. & Huffman, A. H. (2001) Predicting Retention Rates of U.S. Soldiers Stationed in Europe. United States Army Medical Research Unit-Europe, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research; Tremble, T. R., Strickland, W. J., & Sipes, D. E. (2001) Project First Term: A Longitudinal Investigation of Attrition and Retention of First-Term Soldiers in the U.S. Army, U.S. Army Research Institute, Human Resources Research Organization; Rabkin, N. J. (1999) GAO Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Military Personnel, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, Preliminary Results of DOD's 1999 Survey of Active Duty Members.

¹⁸ The fact that an analysis with such a small sample size is significant is evidence of a robust effect, though the small sample size argues for caution in assuming the generalizability of the finding.

¹⁹ These analyses are more complex than others presented. We wanted to look at how the rated chances of re-enlisting at post assessment related to changes over time on key variables such as couple functioning and Army related variables. These analyses were conducted a number of ways, with the results remaining consistent. Regression techniques were used in these analyses. As a key example, the rated chances of re-enlisting at post assessment were regressed onto the chances as rated at pre assessment, the Army family positivity scale at pre assessment, and the Army family positivity scale at post-BSRF. This analysis tests if scores at post on Army family positivity were associated with the rated chances of re-enlistment at post while controlling for the pre-BSRF levels of both variables. If the coefficient for post-BSRF Army family positivity is significantly associated with the chance of re-enlisting at post-BSRF, it means that changes in Army family positivity from pre to post are associated with changes the chance of re-enlisting, pre to post, because initial levels of both have been controlled for in the analysis. This is exactly what was found, both on Army family positivity as well as Army concerns for families. This was true whether or not the key variable was the ratings of the chances of re-enlisting or the other, similar question, where respondents rated whether a statement about re-enlisting was more or less true as a result of taking BSRF.

²⁰ See Halford, K. W., Sanders, M. R., & Behrens, B. C. (2001). Can Skills Training Prevent Relationship Problems in At-Risk Couples? Four-Year Effects of a Behavioral Relationship Education Program. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 15, 750-768.

²¹ Family Life Chaplains are generally trained in PREP early in their Army career (if they have entered the Army in the past five years). Most of the chaplains participating in this program evaluation would have been trained in the several years prior to it. They were trained in the specific aspects of conducting BSRF and the program evaluation requirements in one day briefings that occurred at Ft. Bragg and Ft. Hood during 2001.

²² See the various references throughout the endnotes of this document.

²³ Study and analyses by Dr. Victoria Niederhauser from project conducted by LTC Joann Hollandsworth of Community Health Nursing and Dr. Niederhauser at Scofield Barracks. Contact authors if needing information on how to contact Dr. Niederhauser of LTC Hollandsworth.

²⁴ For example, see: Beach, S. R., & O'Leary, K. D. (1993). Marital discord and dysphoria: For whom does the marital relationship predict depressive symptomatology? *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 10(3), 405-420.; Bradbury, T. N., Beach, S. R. H., Fincham, F. D., & Nelson, G. M. (1996). Attributions and behavior in functional and dysfunctional marriages. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 64, 569-576.; Cummings, E. M., & Davies, P. (1994). *Children and marital conflict*. New York: Guilford.; Gottman, J.M., & Krokoff, L.J. (1989). Marital interaction and satisfaction: A longitudinal view. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 57, 47-52.; Halford, K., & Bouma, R. (1997). Individual psychopathology and marital distress. In K. Halford & H.J. Markman (Eds.). *Clinical Handbook of Marriage and Couples Intervention*, (pp. 291-321). New York: John Wiley and Sons.; Karney, B.R., & Bradbury, T.N. (1995). The longitudinal course of marital quality and stability: A review of theory, method, and research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 118, 3-34.; Kiecolt-Glaser, J.K., Malarkey, W.B., Chee, M., Newton, T., Cacioppo, J.T., Mao, H.Y., Glaser, R. (1993). Negative behavior during marital conflict is associated with immunological down-regulation. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 55, 395-409.; Markman, H.J., & Hahlweg, K. (1993). The prediction and prevention of marital distress: An international perspective. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 13, 29-43.; Matthews, L.S., Wickrama, K.A.S., & Conger, R.D. (1996). Predicting marital instability from spouse and observer reports of marital interaction. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 58, 641-655.

²⁵ It is possible that such apparent "sleeping" effects are more resulting from some artifact of the smaller sample that completed all three time points. But the fact that those these differences were not found pre to post, but that the larger gains appeared by 30 days after post, suggests that those were dimensions where improvements may simply have taken more time to unfold.

²⁶ For example, see Stanley, S.M., Markman, H.J., & Whitton, S. (In Press). Communication, Conflict, and Commitment: Insights On The Foundations of Relationship Success from a National Survey. *Family Process*.

²⁷ In a number of studies of PREP, the strongest findings are on objectively rated couple interaction sequences (coding of video taped conversations). These self-report findings are very strong compared to other evaluations of PREP, which may be due to the fact that most of these couples are married, and not premarital couples, as is more typical in the literature on PREP. These findings are strong evidence of the potential for positive impacts of PREP and programs like it with couples who are relatively young and relatively lower in income.

²⁸ See Farkas, A. J. and K. P. Durning (1982). Characteristics and Needs of Navy Families: Policy Implications. Washington, D.C., U.S. Navy Personnel Research and Development Center.

²⁹ Data provided by Mr. Pascal Lambert (Family Advocacy Program Manager) and Chaplain Curt Schlosser, September 2002. At Ft. Richardson, Family Advocacy and chaplains have worked closely together to deliver relationship building services to Army couples.

³⁰ See Halford, K. W., Sanders, M. R., & Behrens, B. C. (2001). Can Skills Training Prevent Relationship Problems in At-Risk Couples? Four-Year Effects of a Behavioral Relationship Education Program. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 15, 750-768.

³¹ Because of welfare reform and government initiatives to strengthen family and marital relationships, there arises some controversy over the applicability of relationship education to low income populations. While Army couples have many supports that non-Army couples who are comparable on other dimensions may lack, they are non-the-less, on average, of lower income. In the case of the sample here, they are also non-ambiguous about their commitment in these relationships, with most all of these couples either married or planning marriage. As such, with respect to the limitations of this research, it is clear that committed couples who are also lower income, on average, are well able to derive benefits from programs like BSRF.

³² See Johnson, C. A., Stanley, S. M., Glenn, N. D., Amato, P. A., Nock, S. L., Markman, H. J., & Dion, M. R. (2002). *Marriage in Oklahoma: 2001 baseline statewide survey on marriage and divorce* (S02096 OKDHS). Oklahoma City, OK: Oklahoma Department of Human Services. In this survey, young and low income persons were highly likely to say that they would be interested in participating in relationship education.

³³ Fall 1998 SSMP, US Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences Army Personnel Survey Office 5001 Eisenhower Avenue Alexandria, VA 22333-5600. For officers, chaplains were ranked fourth behind a friend, close relative, and immediate supervisor.

³⁴ For example: Stanley, S.M., Markman, H.J., Prado, L.M., Olmos-Gallo, P.A., Tonelli, L., St. Peters, M., Leber, B.D., Bobulinski, M., Cordova, A., & Whitton, S. (2001). Community Based Premarital Prevention: Clergy and Lay Leaders on the Front Lines. *Family Relations*, 50, 67-76.; Markman, H.J., Renick, M.J., Floyd, F., Stanley, S., & Clements, M. (1993). Preventing marital distress through communication and conflict management training: A four and five year follow-up. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 62, 70-77.

Authors

Scott M. Stanley, Ph.D. is co-director of the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver. He has published widely in academic journals on the prevention of marital distress and on marital commitment. He is also a senior program consultant to the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative. Dr. Stanley is actively engaged in national policy discussions with regard to family formation, family stability, and the building of strong and healthy marriages in the United States. He and Howard Markman founded PREP, Inc. to disseminate research based interventions to couples.

Howard J. Markman, Ph.D. is a professor of psychology, and director of the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver. He is widely published in academic journals and internationally known for his work on the prediction and prevention of divorce and marital distress. Drs. Markman and Stanley are currently engaged in a long term study of the effectiveness of PREP disseminated in the community, funded by the National Institute of Mental Health.

Christopher C. Saiz, Ph.D. is a research analyst on the BSRF program evaluation team. He has worked collaborated with PREP, Inc. for nearly 10 years, and received his doctorate in clinical child psychology in 2001. He has broad experience in program evaluation, including on an innovative format for delivery of preventive instruction to couples.

Walter R. Schumm, Ph.D. is a professor of Family Studies at Kansas State University. He has taught family social science at Kansas State University since 1979 and published numerous articles in scholarly and professional military journals. His final command, a professional development brigade, in the Army Reserve earned three of the six "best U. S. Army Reserve Unit in the world" awards from the Reserve Officers Association between 2000 and 2001. In July 2002, he retired as a colonel after over 30 years service in the Active Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserve.

Chaplain (Lieutenant Colonel) Glen L. Bloomstrom, M.Div., M.S. is the Family Ministry Officer for the Army Chief of Chaplains, at the Pentagon. He has been an Army Chaplain since 1982, and has had assignments in Airborne, Ranger, Special Forces and Light Infantry units. He currently oversees family ministry training, policy development and functional training for Army Chaplains. Chaplain Bloomstrom is a Fellow with the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC) and a Clinical Member of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT). He is ordained and endorsed by the Baptist General Conference.

Albert E. Bailey is an Assistant Vice-President with Science Applications International Corporation . A retired soldier, he provides consultant services to the Army and is a principal architect of the Army Well-Being strategic initiative, which is transforming the Army's legacy approach to quality of life. A certified business processes reengineer and strategic planner, Mr. Bailey is actively engaged with strategic initiatives in support of transforming the human dimension of the Army.

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